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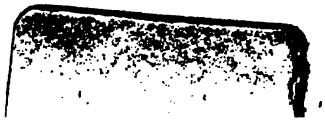

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"You see I know all about it, little one."

"You see I know all about it, little one."

CERISE

A TALE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. M. BROCK

LONDON
W. THACKER & CO., 2 CREED LANE, E.C.
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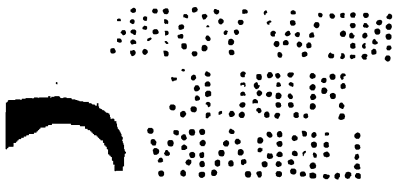

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A TALE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER I

THE DAISY CHAIN

IN the gardens of Versailles, as everywhere else within the freezing influence of the *Grand Monarque*, Nature herself seemed to accept the situation, and succumbed inevitably under the chain of order and courtly etiquette. The grass grew, indeed, and the Great Waters played, but the first was rigorously limited to certain mathematical patches, and permitted only to obtain an established length, while the last threw their diamond showers against the sky with the regular and oppressive monotony of clockwork. The avenues stretched away straight and stiff like rows of lately built houses; the shrubs stood hard and defiant as the white statues with which they alternated, and the very sunshine off the blinding gravel glared and scorched as if its duty were but to mark a march of dazzling hours on square stone dials for the kings of France.

Down in Touraine the woods were sleeping, hushed, and peaceful in the glowing summer's day; sighing, as it were, and stirring in their repose, while the breeze crept through their shadows, and quivered in their outskirts, ere it passed on to cool the peasant's brow, toiling contented in his clearing, with blue home-spun garb, white teeth, and honest sunburnt face.

Far off in Normandy, sleek of skin and rich of colour, cows were ruminating knee-deep in pasturage; hedges were

loaded with wildflowers, thickets dark with rank luxuriance of growth, while fresh streams, over which the blue kingfisher flitted like a dragon-fly, rippled merrily down towards the sea. Through teeming orchards, between waving corn-fields, past convent-walls grown over with woodbine and lilac and laburnum, under stately churches, rearing Gothic spires delicate as needlework to heaven, and bringing with them a cool current of air, a sense of freedom and refreshment as they hurried past. Nay, even where the ripening sun beat fiercely on the vineyards, terraced tier upon tier, to concentrate his rays—where Macon and Côte-d'Or were already tinged with the first faint blush of their coming vintage, even amidst the grape-rows so orderly planted and so carefully trained, buxom peasant-girls could gather posies of wildflowers for their raven hair, to make their black eyes sparkle with merrier glances, and their dusky cheeks mantle in rich carnation, type of southern blood dancing through their veins.

But Versailles was not France, and at Versailles nothing seemed free but the birds and the children.

One of the alleys, commanded from the king's private apartments, was thickly crowded with loungers. Courtiers in silk stockings, laced coats, and embroidered waistcoats reaching to their thighs, wearing diamond hilts on their rapiers, and diamond buckles in their shoes, could not move a step without apology for catching in the spreading skirts of magnificent ladies—magnificent, be it understood, in gorgeousness of apparel rather than in beauty of face or symmetry of figure. The face, indeed, whatever might be its natural advantages, was usually coated with paint and spotted with patches, while the figure was so disguised by voluminous robes, looped-up skirts, falling laces, and such outworks and appendages, not to mention a superstructure of hair, ribbon, and other materials, towering so high above the head as to place a short woman's face somewhere about the middle of her whole altitude, that it must have been difficult even for the maid who dressed her to identify, in one of these imposing triumphs of art, the slender and insignificant little framework upon which the whole fabric had been raised. Devotion in woman is never more sublime than when sustaining the torture of dress.

It was all artificial together. Not a word was spoken but might have been overheard with entire satisfaction by the unseen sovereign who set the whole pageant in motion. Not a gesture but was restrained by the consciousness of supervision. Not a sentiment broached but had for its object the greater glorification of a little old man, feeble and worn-out,

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with us it is different. I am proud to think we *do* resign, and cheerfully, all that gives warmth and colouring to the hard outlines of an earthly life. Is it nothing to forego the triumphs of the camp, the bright pageantry, the graceful luxuries of the Court? Is it nothing to place yourself at once above and outside the pale of those sympathies which form the very existence of your fellow-men? More than all, is it nothing, Malletort," — the young man hesitated, blushed, and cast his eyes down—" is it nothing to trample out of your heart, passions, affections — call them what you will — that seem the very mainspring of your being? Is it nothing to deny yourself at once and for ever the solace of woman's companionship and the rapture of woman's love?"

"You declaim well," replied Malletort, not affecting to conceal that he was amused, "and your arguments would have even more weight were it not that you are so palpably in earnest. This of itself infers error. You will observe, my dear Florian, as a general rule, that the reasoner's convictions are strong in direct proportion to the weakness of his arguments. But let us go a little deeper into this question of celibacy. Let us strip it of its conventional treatment, its supposed injustice, its apparent romance. To what does it amount? That a priest must not marry—good. I repeat, so much the better for the priest. What is marriage in the abstract?—The union of persons for the continuation of the species in separate and distinct races. What is it in the ideal? —The union of souls by an unphilosophical and impossible fusion of identity, which happily the personality of every human being forbids to exist. What is it in reality?—A fetter of oppressive weight and inconvenient fabric, only rendered supportable from the deadening influence of habit, combined with its general adoption by mankind. Look around you into families and observe for yourself how it works. The woman has discovered all her husband's evil qualities, of which she does not fail to remind him; and were she a reflective being, which admits of argument, would wonder hourly how she could ever have endured such a mass of imperfections. The man bows his head and shrugs his shoulders in callous indifference, scorning to analyse the disagreeable question, but clear only of one thing—that if he were free, no consideration would induce him to place his neck again beneath the same yoke. Another — perhaps! The same—never! Both have discovered a dissimilarity in tastes, habits, and opinions, so remarkable that it seems scarcely possible that it should be fortuitous. To neither

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appeared, however, from those obedient features quickly as it came; and at the same moment the marquise passed her hand caressingly over the boy's dark curls, while he bent low before her, and seemed to do homage to her beauty in the act of bidding her a courteous farewell.

CHAPTER IV

TANTARA!

YEAR by year a certain stag had been growing fatter and fatter in the deep glades and quiet woodlands that surrounded Fontainebleau. He was but a pricket when Cerise made her daisy chain in the gardens of Versailles, but each succeeding summer he had rubbed the velvet off another point on his antlers, and in all the king's chase was no finer head than he carried the day he was to die. Brow, bay, and tray, twelve in all, with three in a cup at the summits, had been the result of some half-score years passed in the security and shelter of a royal forest; nor was the lapse of time which had thus brought head and haunch to perfection without its effect upon those for whose pastime the noble beast must fall.

Imagine, then, a glowing afternoon, the second week in August. Not a cloud in the sky, a sun almost tropical in its power, but a pure clear air that fanned the brow wherever the forest opened into glades, and filled the broad nostrils of a dozen large, deep-chested, rich-coloured staghounds, snuffing and questing busily down a track of arid grass that seemed to have checked their steady, well-considered, unrelenting chase, and brought their wondrous instinct to a fault. One rider alone watched their efforts with a preoccupied air, yet with the ready glance of an old sportsman. He had apparently reached his point of observation before the hounds themselves, and far in advance of the rest of the chase. His close-fitting blue riding-coat, trimmed with gold-lace and turned back with scarlet facings, called a *just-au-corps*, denoted that he was a courtier; but the keen eye, the erect figure, the stateliness, even stiffness of his bearing, smacked of the old soldier, more, the old soldier of France, perhaps the most professional veteran in the world.

He was not so engrossed with his own thoughts, however, but that his eye gleamed with pleasure when a tan-coloured sage, intent on business, threw a square sagacious head into

the air, proclaiming in full deep notes his discovery of the line, and solemn conviction that he was right. The horseman swore a good round garrison oath, and cheered the hound lustily. A cry of tuneful tongues pealed out to swell the harmony. A burst of music from a distant glade announced that the stag had passed yet farther on. A couple of royal foresters, in blue and red, arrived on foot, breathless, with fresh hounds struggling in the leash; and a lady on a Spanish barb, attended by a plainly dressed ecclesiastic, came cantering down the glade to rein up at the veteran's side, with a smile of greeting on her face.

"Well met, monsieur le prince, once more," said she, flashing a look from her dark eyes, under which, old as he was, he lowered his own. "Always the same—always successful. In the Court—in the camp—in the ballroom—in the field—if you seek the prince-marshal, look in the most forward post, and you will find him."

She owed him some reparation for having driven him from her side in a fit of ill-humour half an hour before, and this was her way of making amends.

"I have won posts in my time, madame," said the old soldier, an expression of displeasure settling once more on his high worn features, "and held them, too, without dishonour. It is perhaps no disgrace to be worsted by a woman, but it is humiliating and unpleasant all the same."

"Dishonour and disgrace are words that can never be coupled with the name of Château-Guerrand," returned the lady, smiling sweetly in his face, a process that appeared to mollify him considerably. Then she completed his subjection by caressing her horse with one hand, while she reined him in so sharply with the other, that he rose on his hind-legs as if to rear straight on end.

"You are a hard mistress, madame," said the gentleman, looking at the beautiful barb chafing and curveting to its bit.

"It is only to show I *am* mistress," she answered in a low voice, that seemed to finish the business, for turning to her attendant cavalier, who had remained discreetly in the background, she signed to him that he might come up and break the *tête-à-tête*, while she added gaily—

"I am as fond of hunting as you are, prince. Hark! The stag is still forward. Our poor horses are dying with impatience. Let us gallop on together."

The Marquise de Montmirail had considerably altered in character since she tended the infirmities of her poor old husband, or sat in widow's garments with her pretty child on

her knee. A few years at the Court of France had brought to the surface all the evil of her character, and seemed to have stifled in her everything that was good. She had lost the advantage of her daughter's companionship, for Cerise (and in this perhaps the marquise was right) had been removed to a distance from the Court and capital, to bloom into womanhood in the healthier atmosphere of a provincial convent. She missed her darling sadly, no doubt, and for the first year or two contented herself with the gaieties and distractions common to her companions. She encouraged no lover, properly so-called, and had seldom fewer than three admirers at a time. Nor had the king of late taken special notice of her; so she was only hated by the other Court ladies with the due hatred to which she was entitled, from her wealth, beauty, and attractions.

After a while, however, she put in for universal dominion, and then of course the outcry raised against her was loud and long sustained. She heeded it little ; nay, she seemed to like it, and bandied sarcasms with her own sex as joyously, to all appearance, as she exchanged compliments with the other.

She never faltered. She never committed herself. She stood on the brink, and never turned giddy nor lost her presence of mind. What she required, it seemed, what she could not live without, was influence, more or less, but the stronger the better, over every male creature that crossed her path. When this was gained, she had done with them unless they were celebrities, or sufficiently frivolous to be as variable as herself. In either of such cases she took considerable pains to secure the empire she had won. What she liked best was to elicit an offer of marriage. She was supposed to have refused more men, and of more different ranks, than any woman in France. For bachelor or widower who came within the sphere of her influence there was no escape. Sooner or later he must blunder into the net, and the longer he fought the more complete and humiliating was his eventual defeat. "Nothing," said the Abbé Malletort, "nothing but the certainty of the king's unacknowledged marriage to Madame de Maintenon prevented his cousin from obtaining and refusing an offer of the crown of France."

She was beautiful, too, no doubt, which made it so much worse—beautiful both with the beauty of the intellect and the senses. Not strictly by any rules of art, but from grace of outline, richness of colouring, and glowing radiance of health. She had all the ways, too, of acknowledged beauty; and even people who did not care for her were obliged to admit she

possessed that strange, indefinite, inexplicable charm which every man finds in the woman he loves.

The poor prince-marshal, Hector de Château-Guerrand, had undergone the baptism of fire at sixteen, had fought his duels, drank his burgundy, and lost an estate at lansquenet in a night before he was twenty. Since then he had commanded the Musketeers of the Guard—divisions of the great king's troops—more than once a French army in the field. It was hard to be a woman's puppet at sixty—with wrinkles and rheumatism, and failing health, with every pleasure palling, and every pain enhanced. Well, as he said himself—*le cœur ne vieillit jamais!* There is no fool like an old one. The prince-marshal, for that was the title by which he was best known, had never been ardently attached to anybody but himself till now. We need not envy him his condition.

"Let us gallop on together," said the marquise; but ere they could put their horses in motion a yeoman-pricker, armed to the teeth, rode rapidly by, and they waited until his Majesty should have passed. Their patience was not tried for long. While a fresh burst of horns announced another view of the quarry farther on, the king's little *calèche* turned the corner of the alley at speed, and was pulled up with considerable dexterity, that its occupant might listen for a moment to determine on his future course. Louis sat by himself in a light, narrow carriage, constructed to hold but one person. He was drawn by four cream-coloured horses, small, well-bred, and active. A child of some ten years of age acted postilion to the leaders, but the king's own hand drove the pair at wheel, and guided them with all the skill and address of his early manhood.

Nevertheless, he looked very old and feeble when he returned the obeisance of the prince-marshal and his fair companion. Always punctiliously polite, Louis lifted his hat to salute the marquise, but his chin soon sank back on his chest, and the momentary gleam died out in his dull and weary eyes. It was obvious his health was failing day by day; he was now nearly seventy-seven years of age, and the end could not be far off. As he passed on, an armed escort followed at a few paces distance. It was headed by a young officer of the Grey Musketeers, who saluted the prince-marshal with considerable deference, and catching the eye of the marquise, half halted his horse; and then, as if thinking better of it, urged him on again, the colour rising visibly in his brown handsome face. The phenomenon of a musketeer blushing was not likely to be lost on so keen an observer as

Madame de Montmirail, particularly when the musketeer was young, handsome, and an excellent horseman.

"Who is that on guard?" said she, carelessly of course, because she really wanted to know. "A captain of the Grey Musketeers evidently. And yet I do not remember to have seen his face at Court before."

Now it was not to be expected that a Marshal of France should show interest, at a moment's notice, in so inferior an official as a mere captain of musketeers, more particularly when riding with a ladye-love nearly thirty years younger than himself, and of an age far more suitable to the good-looking gentleman about whom she made inquiries. Nevertheless, the prince had no objection to enter on any subject redounding to his own glorification, particularly in war, and it so happened that the officer in question had served as his aide-de-camp in an affair that won him a marshal's baton; so he reduced his horse's pace forthwith, and plunged into the tempting subject.

"A fine young man, madame," said the prince-marshal, like a generous old soldier as he was, "and a promising officer as ever I had the training of. He was with me while a mere cadet in that business when I effected my junction with Vendôme at Villa-Viciosa, and I sent him with despatches from Brighuega right through Staremberg's uhlans, who ought to have cut him into mincemeat. Even Vendôme thanked him in person, and told me himself I must apply for the brave child's promotion."

Like other ladies, the marquise suffered her attention to wander considerably from these campaigning reminiscences. She roused herself, however, enough to answer, not very pertinently—

"What an odious man the duke is, and how hideous. Generally drunk, besides, and always disagreeable!"

The prince-marshal looked a little put out, but he did not for this allow himself to be diverted from his subject.

"A very *fortunate* soldier, madame," he replied pompously; "perhaps more fortunate than really deserving. Nevertheless, in war as in love, merit is of less importance than success. His Majesty thought well to place the duke over the head of officers whose experience was greater, and their services more distinguished. It is not for me to offer an opinion. I serve France, madame, and *you*," he added, with a smile, not too unguarded, because some of his teeth were gone, "I am proud to offer my homage to both."

The marquise moved her horse impatiently. The subject did not seem to amuse her, but the prince-marshal had got on

a favourite theme, and was not going to abandon it without a struggle.

"I do not think, madame," he proceeded, laying his hand confidentially on the barb's crest—"I do not think I have ever explained to you in detail the strategical reasons of my forced march on Villa-Viciosa in order to co-operate with Vendôme. I have been blamed in military circles for evacuating Brighuega after taking it, and abandoning the position I held at the bridge the day before the action, which I had caused to be strengthened during the night. Now there is much to be urged on both sides regarding this movement, and I will endeavour to make clear to you the arguments for and against the tactics I thought it my duty to adopt. In the first place, you must bear in mind that the enemy's change of front on the previous morning, which was unexpected by us, and for which Staremberg had six cogent reasons, being as follows"—

The marquise looked round to her other cavalier in despair; but no assistance was to be expected from the cynical abbé, for it was Malletort in attendance, as usual, on his cousin.

The prince-marshal was, doubtless, about to recount the dispositions and manœuvres of three armies seriatim, with his own advice and opinions thereon, when relief came to his listener from a quarter in which she least expected it. She was preparing herself to endure for the hundredth time the oft-told tale, when her horse started, snorted, trembled violently, and attempted to wheel round. In another instant an animal half as big as itself leaped leisurely into the glade, and went lurching down the dry sunny vista as if in utter disregard and contempt of its pursuers.

The stag had been turned back at several points by the horns of the foresters, who thus melodiously greeted every appearance of their quarry. He was beginning to think some distant refuge would be safer and more agreeable; also his instinct told him that the scent would improve while he grew warmer, and that his noisy pursuers would track him more and more unerringly as the sun went down. Already he felt the inconvenience of those fat haunches and that broad russet back he carried so magnificently; already he heard the deep-mouthed chorus chiming nearer and nearer, full, musical, and measured, like a death-bell.

"*En avant!*" exclaimed Madame de Montmirail, as the stag, swerving from a stray hound, stretched into an honest, undisguised gallop down the glade, followed by the straggler at its utmost speed, labouring, over-paced, distressed, but

rolling on, mute, resolute, and faithful to the line. The love of rapid motion, inseparable from health, energy, and high spirits, was strong in the marquise. Her barb, in virtue of his blood, possessed pace and endurance; his mistress called on him to prove both, while she sped along on the line of chase, accompanied by several of the hounds, as they straggled up in twos and threes, and followed by most of the equestrians. Thus they reached the verge of the forest, and here stood the king's *calèche* drawn up, his Majesty signing to them feebly yet earnestly that the stag was away over the plain.

Great was now the confusion at so exciting and so unexpected an event. The foresters, with but little breath to spare, managed to raise a final flourish on their horns. The yeoman-prickers spurred their horses with a vigour more energetic than judicious; the hounds, collecting as it seemed from every quarter of the forest, were already stringing, one after another, over the dusty plain. The king, too feeble to continue the chase, yet anxious to know its result, whispered a few words to his officer of the guard, and the musketeer, starting like an arrow from a bow, sped away after the hounds with some half-dozen of the keenest equestrians, amongst whom were the marquise and the prince-marshal. Many of the courtiers, including the abbé, seemed to think it disloyal thus to turn their backs on his Majesty, and gathered into a cluster to watch with interjections of interest and delight the pageant of the fast-receding chase. The far horizon was bounded by another range of woods, and that shelter the stag seemed resolved to reach. The intervening ground was a vast undulating plain, crossed apparently by no obstacles to hounds or horsemen, and varied only by a few lines of poplars and a paved highroad to the nearest market-town.

The stag then made direct for this road, but long ere he could reach it, the chase had become so severe that many of the hounds dropped off one by one; and of the horses, only those ridden by the marquise, the prince-marshal, and the Grey Musketeer, were able to keep up the appearance of a gallop. Presently these successful riders drew near enough to distinguish clearly the object of their pursuit. The musketeer was in advance of the others, who galloped on abreast, every nerve at its highest strain, and too preoccupied to speak a syllable.

Suddenly a dip in the ground hid the stag from sight; then he appeared again on the opposite rise, looking darker, larger, and fresher than before. The musketeer turned round and pointed towards the hollow in front. In a few more strides

his followers perceived a fringe of alders serpentining between the two declivities. Madame de Montmirail's dark eyes flashed, and she urged her barb to yet greater exertions. The musketeer sat back in his saddle, and seemed to collect his horse's energies for an effort. There was an increase of speed, a spring, a stagger, and he was over the rivulet that stole deep and cool and shining between the alders. The marquise followed his horse's footmarks to an inch, and though the barb threw his head up wildly, and galloped furiously at it, he too cleared the chasm and reached the other side in safety.

The prince-marshal's old blood was warmed up now, and he flew along, feeling as he used in the days of the duels, and the burgundy, and the lansquenet. He shouted and spurred his steed, urging it with hand and voice and leg, but the highly broken and well-trained animal felt its powers failing, and persistently declined to attempt the feat it had seen the others accomplish; so the prince-marshal was forced to discontinue the chase and remain on the safe side of the Rubicon, whence he turned his horse unwillingly homewards, heated, angry, and swearing many strange oaths in different languages.

Meanwhile the other two galloped on. The marquise, though she spared no effort, found herself unable to overtake the captain of Grey Musketeers. All at once he stopped short at a clump of willows, through which the chase had disappeared, and jumping off his horse, left the panting beast to its own devices. When she reached the trees, and looked down into the hollow below, she perceived the stag up to his chest in a bright, shallow pool, at bay, and surrounded by the eager though exhausted hounds.

The musketeer had drawn his *couteau de chasse*, and was already knee-deep in the water, but hearing her approach, turned back, and, taking his hat off, with a low obeisance, offered her the handle of his weapon. It was the customary form when a lady happened to be present on such an occasion, though, as now, the compliment was almost always declined. He had scarcely gone in and given the *coup de grace*, which he did like an accomplished sportsman, before some of the yeomen-prickers and other attendants came up, so that the disembowelling and other obsequies were performed with proper ceremony. Long, however, ere these had been concluded the marquise was riding her tired horse slowly homeward through the still, sweet autumn evening, not the least disturbed that she had lost the abbé and the rest of her escort, but ruminating, pleasantly and languidly, as her blood cooled

Offered her the handle of his weapon

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down, on the excitement of the chase and the events of the day. She watched the sunset reddening and fading on the distant woods; the haze of twilight gradually softening, and blurring and veiling the surrounding landscape; the curved edge of the young moon peering over the trees, and the evening-star hanging, like a golden lamp, against the purple curtain of the sky. With head bent down, loose reins, and tired hands resting on her lap, Madame de Montmirail pondered on many matters as the night began to fall. She wondered at the abbé's want of enterprise, at the prince-marshal's activity—if the first could have yet reached home, and whether the second, with his rheumatism, was not likely to spend a night in the woods. She wondered at the provoking cynicism of the one and the extraordinary depressive powers possessed by the other; more than all, how she could for so long have supported the attentions of both. She wondered what would have happened if the barb had fallen short at his leap; whether the musketeer would have stopped in his headlong course to pity and tend her, and rest her head upon his knee, inclining to the belief that he would have been very glad to have the opportunity.

Then she wondered what it was about this man's face that haunted her memory, and where she could have seen those bold keen eyes before.

CHAPTER V

THE USHER OF THE BLACK ROD

FOR the courtiers of Louis le Grand there was no such thing as hunger or thirst, want of appetite, heat, cold, lassitude, depression, or fatigue. If he chose they should accompany him on long journeys, in crowded carriages, over bad roads, they were expected, nevertheless, to appear fresh, well-dressed, exuberant in spirits, inclined to eat or content to starve, unconscious of sun and wind; above all, ready to agree with his Majesty upon every subject at a moment's notice. Ladies enjoyed in this respect no advantage over gentlemen. Though a fair amazon had been hunting the stag all day, she would be required to appear just the same in grand Court toilet at night; to take her place at lansquenet; to be present at the royal concerts, twenty fiddles playing a heavy opera of Cavalli right through; or, perhaps, only to assist in lining the great gallery, which the king traversed on his way to supper. Everything must yield to the lightest whim of royalty, and no more characteristic reply was ever made to this arbitrary descendant of St. Louis than that of the eccentric Cardinal Bonzi, to whom the king complained one day at dinner that he had no teeth. "Teeth, sire!" replied the astute churchman, showing, while he spoke, a strong, even, well-polished row of his own, "why, who *has* any teeth?"

His Majesty, however, like mortals of inferior rank, did not touch on the accomplishment of his seventy-seventh year without sustaining many of the complaints and inconveniences of old age. For some time past not only had his teeth failed, but his digestion, despite of the regimen of iced fruits and sweetmeats, on which he was put by his physician Fagon, became unequal to its task. Everybody but himself and his

doctor perceived the rapidity with which a change was approaching. In vain they swaddled him up in feather-pillows at night, to draw the gout from him through the pores of his skin; in vain they administered sage, veronica, cassia, and Jesuit-bark between meals, while they limited his potations to a little weak burgundy and water, thereby affording some amusement to those present from the wry faces made by foreign lords and grandees who were curious to taste the king's beverage. In vain they made him begin dinner with mulberries, and melons, and rotten figs, and strong soups, and salads. There is but one remedy for old age, and it is only to be found in the pharmacopœia, at the last chapter of the book. To that remedy the king was fast approaching—and yet hunting, fiddling, dining, promenades, concerts, and the whole round of empty Court gaiety went on all the same.

The Marquise de Montmirail returned to her apartments at the palace with but little time to spare. It wanted but one hour from the king's supper, and she must attend with the other ladies of the Court, punctual as clock-work, directly the folding-doors opened into the gallery, and his Majesty, in an enormous wig, should totter in at one end to totter out again at the other. Nevertheless, a good deal of decoration can be done in sixty minutes, when a lady, young and beautiful, is assisted by an attendant whose taste becomes chastened and her activity quickened by the superintendence of four distinct toilets every day. So the marquise and Célandine between them had put the finishing touches to their great work within the appointed time. The former was going through a gratifying revision of the whole at her looking-glass, and the latter was applying to her mistress's handkerchief that perfume of orange-flowers which alone his Majesty could endure, when a loud knocking at the outer door of the apartment suspended the operations of each, bringing an additional colour to the marquise's cheek, and a cloud of displeasure on the quadroon's brow.

"See what it is, Célandine," said the former calmly, wondering in her heart, though it seemed absurd, whether this disturbance could relate in any manner to the previous events of the day.

"It is the abbé, I'll be bound," muttered Célandine, proceeding to do as she was bid; adding, sulkily, though below her breath, "He might knock there till his knuckles were sore if I was mistress instead of maid!"

It was the abbé, sure enough, in plain attire, as became his profession; but with an expression of hope and elation on

his brow which even his perfect self-command seemed unable to conceal.

"Pardon, madame!" said he, standing, hat in hand, on the threshold; "I was in attendance to conduct you to the gallery, as usual, when the intelligence that reached me, and, indeed, the confusion I myself witnessed, induced me to take the liberty of waiting on you at once."

"No great liberty," answered the marquise, smiling, "seeing that I must have encountered you, at anyrate, within three paces of my door. But what is this alarming news, my cousin, that agitates even your imperturbable front? Nothing wrong with the barb, I hope!"

"Not so bad as that, madame," replied the abbé, who was rapidly recovering his calmness. "It is only a matter affecting his Majesty. I have just learned the king is taken seriously ill. Fagon crossed the courtyard five minutes ago. Worse than that, Père Tellier has been sent for."

"Père Tellier!" repeated the marquise. "The king's confessor! Then the attack is dangerous?"

"There is no doubt that his Majesty's state is precarious in the extreme," answered the abbé seriously. "It is a severe and exhausting malady from which he suffers, and at his time of life we may anticipate the gravest results. Madame, I must be in Paris by break of day to-morrow, to wait on the Duke of Orleans."

She looked at him with a half-contemptuous indulgence, and laughed.

"So soon?" said she. "Nay, then, I am satisfied you think the worst. My cousin, you are wise in your generation, no doubt; and it would be a sudden blow, indeed, that should fall and find you unprepared. Nevertheless, is not this haste indecent? Worse; is it not ill-judged? The king has a wonderful constitution; Fagon is a cautious physician. His Majesty may recover in spite of his doctor."

"And sin again in spite of his confessor," added the abbé. "Nevertheless, I think both have foreseen a crisis for some time past. Fagon has called in Marechal to help him; and Père Tellier has been asking for every vacant benefice during the last three weeks."

"It was very polite of you, my cousin," observed the marquise, after a pause, "to come and tell me at once; though the only immediate result of all this confusion to *me* is, that I suppose I may undress and go to bed. I have had a fatiguing day."

"Pardon again," answered the abbé. "I fear you must

attend as usual in the gallery; and, indeed, it would be a thousand pities that such a toilette should be wasted, for you look beautiful, and are charmingly dressed. You know, besides, that only the king's own order can rescind the daily regulations for the Court."

"We had better proceed, then," said Madame de Montmirail. "Célandine has revised me thoroughly, and the sooner I go the sooner I shall get it over. Believe me, it would require some excitement stronger than common to keep me awake to-night."

"One instant, madame," replied the abbé. "I will not detain you longer; but at a crisis like the present, what I have to say merits your most earnest attention. In the first place, will you permit Célandine to examine if the outer door be shut?"

The scowl on the quadroon's brow grew deeper, while, in obedience to a sign from her mistress, she retired into the outer chamber. The marquise seated herself on a couch near the toilet-table, spreading her skirts out carefully, lest their freshness might sustain damage in that position, and prepared to receive her cousin's confidences, as he stood near, cool, polished, smiling, but obviously repressing, with an effort, the strong agitation under which he laboured.

While she sat in that graceful attitude, her head turned up towards his face, one beautifully moulded arm and hand resting in her lap, the other yet ungloved holding a closed fan against her lips, it may have occurred to the abbé that so many charms of person and manner might be applied to a worthier purpose than the furtherance of Court intrigues, or the advancement of any one man's ambition. It may even have occurred to him, though doubtless if it did so the thought had to be stifled as it rose, that it would be no unpleasant task, however difficult, to woo and win and wear such beauty for himself and his own happiness; and that to be his cousin's favoured lover was a more enviable position than could be afforded by comptroller's wand, or cardinal's cap, or minister's portfolio. For a moment his rugged features softened like a clearing landscape under a gleam of sun, while he looked on her and basked, as it were, in the radiance of her beauty, ere he turned back to the chill, shadowy labyrinth of deceit in which he spent his life.

Madame de Montmirail's exterior was of that sparkling kind which, like the diamond, is enhanced by the richness of its setting. In full Court toilette as he saw her now, few women would have cared to enter the lists as her rivals.

The dress she wore was of pale yellow satin, displaying, indeed, with considerable liberality, her graceful neck and shoulders, glowing in the warm tints of a brunette. It fitted close to her well-turned bust, spreading into an enormous volume of skirts below the waist, overlaid by a delicate fabric of black lace, and looped up here and there in strings of pearls. Her waving hair, black and glossy, was turned back from a low broad forehead, and gathered behind her ears into a shining mass, from which a ringlet or two escaped, smooth and elastic, to coil, snake-like, on her bosom. One row of large pearls encircled her neck, and one bracelet of diamonds and emeralds clung to her ungloved arm. Other ornaments she had none, though an open dressing-case on the toilet-table flashed and glittered like a jeweller's shop.

And now I have only made an inventory of her dress after all. How can I hope to convey an idea of her face? How is it possible to describe that which constitutes a woman's loveliness? that subtle influence which, though it generally accompanies harmony of colouring and symmetry of feature, is by no means the result of these advantages; nay, often exists without them, and seems in all cases independent of their aid. I will only say of her charms, that Madame de Montmirail was already past thirty, and nine men out of every ten in the circle of her acquaintance were more or less in love with her.

She had a beautiful foot, besides. It was peeping out now from beneath her dress. The abbé's eyes unconsciously fixed themselves on the small white satin shoe, as he proceeded with his confidences.

"It is good to be prepared, my cousin," said he, in a low, hurried voice, very different from his usual easy, careless tone. "Everything will now be changed, if, as I expect, the indisposition of to-night is but the beginning of the end. You know my situation; you know my hopes; you know the difficulties I have had to contend with. The king's suspicions, the courtiers' jealousy, the imprudence of my patron himself; and you know, too, that through good and evil I have always stood firm by the Duke of Orleans. It is evident that in a few days he will be the most powerful man in France."

"Afterwards?" asked the marquise, apparently unmoved by the contingency.

"Afterwards!" repeated Malletort, almost with indignation. "Do you not see the career that opens itself before us all? Who is best acquainted with the duke's early history?—

Abbé Malletort. Who is the duke bound to serve before the whole world? Not from gratitude—bah! that is a thing of course—but from motives of the clearest self-interest?—Abbé Malletort. In brief, in whom does he confide?—In Abbé Malletort. And to whom does the abbé lay bare his hopes, his aspirations, his ambition?—To whom but to his sweet cousin, Madame de Montmirail?"

"And what would you have me do?" asked the marquise, yawning, while she carelessly fastened the bracelet on her arm.

"I would have you guard your lips with a clasp of iron," answered the abbé. "I would have you keep watch to-night and to-morrow, and every day till the end comes—on your words, your looks, your gestures—the very trimmings and colour of the dresses you wear. Be polite to all; but familiar, cordial, even communicative with none. In brief, have no friends, no enemies, no dislikes, no predilections, till the old state of affairs is ended and the new begun."

"I think you can trust me," answered the marquise. "My feelings are little likely to betray me into indiscretion; and though I have plenty of lovers at Court, I do not imagine I have many friends."

She spoke wearily, and finished with something like a sigh.

The abbé's eyes sparkled. "I *know* I can!" said he. "My cousin has none of the weaknesses of her sex, and all its beauty for her own share." Then he opened the door and spoke loud enough for Célandine to hear. "We must have mademoiselle back from her pension. She is old enough now to take her place as an ornament to society and the Court."

Malletort understood true economy, and he knew that this bribe, while it cost him nothing, would purchase favour with the quadroon, whose dislike he had observed and resolved to efface.

Madame de Montmirail bowed and took his arm. It was now high time they were both in attendance on his Majesty, should the concert fixed for that night be permitted to take place. As they walked through the corridor, however, a great confusion was heard in the gallery they were about to enter. There was a scuffling of feet, a murmur of agitated voices suppressed to whispers, and the smothered sobs of women, denoting some sad catastrophe. When the door opened, the musicians crowded hurriedly out, carrying with them their instruments, and tumultuously impeding the

progress of a spare grave man in a priest's dress, who pushed his way through, with every appearance of anxiety and dismay.

It was Père Tellier, the king's confessor, summoned in mortal haste to the bedside of his dying master.

The marquise and the abbé had that day looked their last upon the face of Louis le Grand. Already, through pale attendants and anxious courtiers, through valets and chamberlains and Musketeers of the Guard, might be seen approaching the real Usher of the Black Rod.

CHAPTER VI

A JESUIT'S TASK

OF all armies on earth, there is none with a discipline so perfect as exists in the ranks of the Jesuits. No similar brotherhood embraces so extensive a scheme; no society spreads its ramifications so wide and deep. The soldier who enlists under that black banner abandons at once and for ever his own affections, his own opinions, his own responsibilities; nay, his very identity becomes fused in the general organisation of his order. Florian de St. Croix, with his warm impulsive disposition, his tendency to self-sacrifice, and his romantic temperament, had better have hanged round his neck any other millstone than this.

As he walked rapidly down a long perspective of paved road, between two lofty rows of poplars, his head bent low, his hands clenched, his lips muttering, and his swift unequal strides denoting both impetuosity and agitation, he seemed strangely and sadly altered from the bright enthusiastic youth who sat with Abbé Malletort under the limes at Versailles. His very name had been put off, with every other association that could connect the past life of the layman with the future labours of the priest. He was known as Brother Ambrose now in the muster-rolls of the order; though, out of it, he was still addressed as Florian by his former friends. It was supposed, perhaps, in the wisdom of his superiors, that the devoted knight could fight best under a plain shield on which no achievements might ever be emblazoned; but which, in theory at least, was to be preserved pure and stainless, until he was carried home on it from his last field.

For Florian, indeed, the battle had already commenced. He was fighting it now, fiercely, under that smiling summer sky, between those fragrant meadows, fringed with flowering hedges, amongst the clustering orchards and smiling farms, the green nooks, the gleaming waters, and the free, fresh range of wooded hill and dale in pleasant Normandy. Little thought the buxom peasant-woman, with her clean white cap,

polemics, or the usual duties of a priest. There are proverbs used in the world, such as "Tit-for-tat," "The biter bit," "Go for wool, and come back shorn," which are applicable to ecclesiastics as to laymen. It is no safer to play with edged tools in a convent than in a ballroom, and it is a matter of the merest hazard who shall get the best of an encounter in which the talents and education of a clever but susceptible man are pitted against the bright looks and fresh roses of girlhood at eighteen.

Florian had been enjoined to use every effort for the subjugation of Mademoiselle de Montmirail. He was to be restricted by no considerations such as hamper the proceedings of ordinary minds, for was not this one of the fundamental principles of his order—"It is lawful to do evil that good may come"? He had not, indeed, swallowed this maxim without considerable repulsion, so utterly at variance, as it seemed, not only with reason, but with that instinctive sentiment of right which is often a surer guide than even reason itself; but he had been convinced against his will by those under whose feet he had chosen to place his neck, and had at last brought his opinions, if not his feelings, to the necessary state of control. A few interviews with Mademoiselle de Montmirail in the cool dark convent parlour—a few calm still evenings in the quiet convent garden, under the shade of the trellised beeches, amidst the fragrance of the flower-beds and the heavy perfume of the syringa, waiting for the rustle of that white dress along the gravel-walk—a few questions and misgivings from the penitent—a few phrases of advice or encouragement from the priest—and Florian found himself wildly, hopelessly, wickedly in love with the girl whom it was his duty, his sacred duty, on which his soul's salvation depended, to persuade, or lure, or force into a cloister. These things come by degrees. No man can complain that timely warning is not given him; yet the steps are so gradual, so easy, so imperceptible, by which he descends into the pleasant flood, that it is only when his footing is lost he becomes really aware of danger, or knows he is sentenced, and must swim about in it till he drowns.

Florian's task was to obtain influence over the girl. Thus he salved his conscience till it was too late, and thus excused himself for the eagerness with which he caught every glance of her eye, and drank in every tone of her voice. It was only when his own looks fell before hers, when he trembled and turned pale at the sound of her step—when her image—

serene, and fair, and gracious — rose between him and the Cross at which he knelt, that he knew his peril, his weakness, and his sin. But it was too late then; though he wrestled with the phantom, it overcame him time by time. Prostrate, bleeding, vanquished, he would confess with something of the bitterness of spirit and plaintive proud self-sacrifice of a lost angel, that he had given his soul to Cerise and did not grudge her the gift.

Not even though she refused to love him in return. Perhaps, after all, this was the poisoned edge of the weapon —the bitter drop in the cup; and yet had it been otherwise, it may be the young Jesuit could have found strength to conquer his infatuation, self-sacrifice to give up freely that which was freely his own. It was not so, however. The very innocence that guarded the girl, while it lured him irresistibly to destruction, was the most insurmountable barrier in his path; and so he hovered on, hoping that which he dared not realise—wishing for all he felt he would yet be unwilling to accept; striving for a prize unspeakably precious, though, perhaps I should say, *because* impossible of attainment, and which, even if he could win it, he might not wear it so much as an hour. No wonder his heart beat and his breath came quick, while he passed with stealthy gait into the convent garden, a pitfall for the feet that walked in innocence—a black sheep in a stainless flock—a leper where all the rest were clean.

But Cerise, radiant in her white dress, crossed the sunny lawn and came down the accustomed path with more than their usual light shining in her blue eyes, with a fresher colour than common on her soft young cheeks. To him she had never looked so beautiful, so womanly, so attractive. The struggle had been very fierce during his solitary walk; the defeat was flagrant in proportion. He ought to have known a bitter disappointment must be in store to balance the moment of rapture in which he became conscious of her approach. Some emanation seemed to glorify the air all around her, and to warn him of her presence long before she came. To the lady-superior of the convent, to her elders and instructors, Mademoiselle de Montmirail was nothing more than a well-grown damsel, with good eyes and hair, neither more nor less frivolous and troublesome than her fellows, with much room for improvement in the matters of education, music, manners, and deportment; but to the young Jesuit she was simply—an angel.

Cerise held both hands out to her director, with a greeting

so frank and cordial that it should have undeceived him on the spot. The lady-superior, from her shaded windows, might or might not be a witness to their interview, and there is no retreat perhaps of so much seclusion, yet so little privacy, as a convent garden; but Cerise did not care though nuns and lay-sisters and all overlooked her every gesture, and overheard every word she spoke.

"I am so pleased!" she burst out, clapping her hands, as soon as he released them. "Wish me joy, good father! I have such happy news! My dear kind mamma! And she writes to me herself! I knew the silk that fastened it even before I saw her hand on the cover. Such good news! Oh, I am so pleased! so pleased!"

She would have danced for pure joy had she not remembered she was nearly eighteen. Also perhaps, for a girl's heart is very pitiful, she may have had some faint shadowy conception that the news so delightful to herself would be less welcome to her companion. He was looking at her with the admiration in his heart shining out of his deep dark eyes.

"You have not told me what your good news is, my daughter," he observed, in a tone that made her glance into and away from his face, but that sobered the effervescence of her gaiety like a charm.

"It is a long letter from mamma!" she said, "and a whole month before I expected one. Judge if that is not charming. But, better still, I am to go back to her very soon. I am to live with her at the Hôtel Montmirail. She is fitting up my apartment already. I am to quit the convent when my quarter is out!"

He knew it was coming. There is always consciousness of a blow for a moment before it falls.

"Then you have but a few more days to remain in Normandy," replied the young priest; and again the change in his voice arrested her attention. "My daughter, will you not regret the happy hours you have spent here, the quiet, the repose of the convent, and—and—the loving friends you leave behind?"

He glanced round while he spoke, and thought how different the white walls, the drooping branches, the lawn, the flower-beds, and the walk beneath the beeches would look when she was gone.

"Of course I shall never cease to love all those I have known here," she answered; and her eye met his own fearlessly, while there was no tinge of sorrow such as he would

have liked to detect in her voice. "But I am going home, do you see! home to my dear mamma; and I shall be in Paris, and assist at operas, and balls, and fêtes. My father! I fear I shall like it—oh! so much!"

There remained little time for further explanations. The refectory bell was ringing, and Cerise must hurry in and present herself for her ration of fruit and chocolate; to which refreshment, indeed, she seemed more than usually inclined. Neither her surprise nor her feelings had taken away her appetite, and she received her director's benediction with a humility respectful, edifying, and filial, as if he had been her grandfather.

"I shall perhaps not visit you at the convent again, my daughter," he had said, revolving in his own mind a thousand schemes, a thousand impossibilities, tinged alike with fierce, bitter disappointment; and to this she had made answer meekly—

"But you will think of me very often, my father; and, oh, remember me, I entreat of you, in your prayers!"

Then Florian knew that the edifice he had taken such pains to rear was crumbling away before his eyes, because, in his anxiety to build it for his own habitation, he had laid its foundations in the sand.

CHAPTER VII

ST. MARK'S BALSAM

THE death of the great king, and the first transactions of the Regency, left little leisure to Abbé Malletort for the thousand occupations of his every-day life. With the busy churchman, to stagnate was a cessation of existence. As some men study bodily health and vigour, carefully attending to the development of their frames by constant and unremitting exercise, so did the abbé preserve his intellect in the highest possible training by its varied use, and seemed to grudge the loss of every hour in which he either omitted to learn something new or lay a fresh stepping-stone for the employment of knowledge previously acquired. Like Juvenal's Greek, he studied all the sciences in turn, but his labour was never without an object, nor had he the slightest scruples in applying its results to his own advantage. Malletort was qualified to deal with the most consummate knave, but he might have been unconsciously out-manœuvred by a really honest man, simply from his own habitual disregard of the maxim, as true in ethics as in mathematics, which teaches that the shortest way from any one given point to another is a straight line.

The abbé had therefore many irons in his fire, careful, however, so to hold them that he should preserve his own fingers from being burnt; and amongst others, he often applied his spare hours to the study of chemistry.

Now, in the time of which I am speaking, the tree of knowledge had not been entirely denuded of its parasite credulity. Science and superstition were not yet finally divorced, and the philosopher's stone was still eagerly sought by many an enthusiast who liked to regenerate the world in a process of which the making a colossal fortune for himself should be the first step. Not that the abbé quite believed in the possibility of creating gold, but that, true to his character, he was prepared to be satisfied with any glittering substitute which the world could be induced to accept in its stead. So he too had his

little laboratory, his little forge, his little crucibles, and vials, and acids, and essences, all the rudiments of science, and some faint foreshadowings of her noblest discoveries.

If a man goes into his garden, and seeks eagerly on hands and knees, we will suppose, for a four-leaved shamrock, I am not prepared to say that he will succeed in finding that rare and abnormal plant; but in his search after it, and the close attention thereby entailed, he will doubtless observe many beauties of vegetation, many curious arrangements of nature that have hitherto escaped his notice; and though he fails to discover the four-leaved shamrock, he makes acquaintance with a hundred no less interesting specimens, and returns home a wiser naturalist than he went out. So was it with the adepts, as they called themselves, who sought diligently after the philosopher's stone. They read, they thought, they fused, they dissolved, they mingled; they analysed fluids, they separated gases; they ascertained the combinations of which one substance was formed, and the ingredients into which another could be resolved. They missed the object of their search, no doubt, but they lost neither for themselves nor their successors all the result of their labours; for while the precious elixir itself escaped them, they captured almost everything else that was worth learning for the application of chemistry to the humbler purposes of every-day life. Unfortunately, too, in tampering with so many volatile essences, they became familiar with the subtler kinds of poison. A skilful adept of that school knew how to rid a patron of his enemies in twenty-four hours without fail, and to use the while no more overt weapon than the grasp of a gloved hand, a pinch of scented snuff, or the poisoned fragrance of a posy of flowers.

Such men drove a thriving trade in Paris during the Regency, and our abbé, himself no mean proficient in the craft, was in the habit of spending many an hour in the laboratory of one who could boast he was a match for the most skilful of the brotherhood. It was for this purpose that Malletort crossed the Seine, and penetrated into one of the loftiest, gloomiest, and narrowest streets of Old Paris—how different from Imperial Paris of to-day!—to thread its windings, with his accustomed placid face and jaunty step, ere he stopped at the door of the tallest, most dilapidated, and dirtiest building in the row.

The abbé's face was, if possible, more self-satisfied, his step even lighter than usual. He was in high favour with the Regent, and the Regent, at least among the lower classes,

was still the most popular man in France. They were aware of his vices, indeed, but passed them over in a spirit of liberality, bordering on want of principle, with which the French, in this respect so unlike ourselves, permit their leading men a latitude of private conduct proportioned to their public utility. Had the abbé doubted his patron's popularity, he need only have listened to an impudent little urchin, who ran almost between his legs, shouting at the top of his voice a favourite street-song of the day, called "The Débonnaire."

"'Tis a very fine place to be monarch of France,
Most Christian king, and St. Louis's son;
When he takes up his fiddle the others must dance,
And they durstn't sit down till the music's done.
But I'd rather be Regent—eh! wouldn't you, Pierre?
Such a Regent as ours, so débonnaire.
Tra-la-la—tra-la-la—such a mien, such an air!
Oh, yes! our Regent is débonnaire.

A monarch of France, when they bring him to dine,
They must hand him a cloth, and a golden bowl;
But the Regent can call for a flagon of wine,
And need never sit down till he's emptied the whole.
He wouldn't give much for your dry-lipped fare,
This Regent of ours, so débonnaire.
Tra-la-la—tra-la-la—how he'll stagger and swear,
Oh, yes! our Regent is débonnaire.

A monarch of France has a mate on the throne,
And his likings and loves must be under the rose;
But the Regent takes all the sweet flowers for his own,
And he pulls them by handfuls wherever he goes.
Of the bright and the fair, the rich and the rare,
Our Regent you see, is so débonnaire.
Tra-la-la—tra-la-la—he puts in for his share,
Oh, yes! our Regent is débonnaire.

A monarch of France has his peers in a row,
And they bring him his boots with the morning light;
But our Regent is never caught bare-footed so,
For his roués and he, they sit booted all night!
And they drink and they swear, and they blink and they stare—
And never a monarch of France can compare,
Neither Louis the Fat, nor yet Philip the Fair,
With this Regent of ours, so débonnaire.
Tra-la-la—tra-la-la—let us drink to him, Pierre!
Oh, yes! our Regent is débonnaire."

"Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, he is débonnaire!" hummed the abbé, as he mounted the wooden staircase, and stopped at the first door on the landing. "Monsieur le duc is welcome to make all the music for our puppet dance so long as he leaves it to monsieur l'abbé to pull the strings."

Two gaudily-dressed footmen answered Malletort's sum-

mons, and admitted him obsequiously, as being a well-known friend of their master's, before he had time to ask if Signor Bartoletti was within. The abbé had visited here too often to be surprised at the luxuries of the apartment into which he was ushered, so little in character with the dirt and dilapidation that prevailed outside; but Signor Bartoletti, alleging in excuse the requirements of his southern blood, indulged in every extravagance to which his means would stretch, was consequently always in difficulties, and therefore ready to assist in any scheme, however nefarious, provided he was well paid.

The signor's tastes were obviously florid. Witness the theatrical appearance of his lackeys, the bright colour of his furniture, the gaudy ornaments on his chimney-piece, the glaring pictures on his walls; nay, the very style and chasing of a massive flagon of red wine standing on the table by a filigree basket of fruit for his refection. The man himself, too, was palpably over-dressed, wearing a sword here in the retirement of his chamber, yet wearing it as one whose hand was little familiar with its guard. Every resource of lace, velvet, satin, and embroidery had been employed in vain to give him an outward semblance of distinction, but there was an expression of intellect and energy in his dark beetle-browed face, with its restless black eyes, that, in spite of low stature and ungainly make, redeemed him from the imputation of utter vulgarity. His hands, too (and there is a good deal of character in the hand), were strong, nervous, and exceedingly well-shaped, though sadly stained and scorched by the acids he made use of in the prosecution of his art.

A less keen observer than the abbé might not have remarked beneath the signor's cordial greeting symptoms of anxiety, and even apprehension, blended with something of the passive defiance which seems to say, "I am in a corner. I have no escape. I don't like it; but I must make the best of it."

A less keen observer, too, might not have detected a ring of bravado in the tone with which he accosted his visitor as a disciple and fellow-labourer in the cause of science.

"Welcome, monsieur," said he—"welcome to the teacher who needs the assistance of his pupil every step he travels on the radiant path. Have you made discoveries, monsieur l'abbé?—Fill your glass, and impart them. Have you encountered difficulties?—Fill your glass, and conquer them. Have you seen the true light glimmering far, far off across

the black waters?—Fill your glass, I say, and let us drink success to our voyage ere we embark once more in search of the Great Secret."

"Faith, I believe we're nearer it than you think for, Bartoletti," answered Malletort, smiling coldly; "though I doubt if you could look to the right point of the compass for it with all your geography. What do you think of the Scotchman's banking scheme, my gold-seeking friend? Is not Monsieur Las[1] a better alchemist than either of us? Has he not discovered the Great Arcanum? And without fire or bellows, crucible, alembic, or retort? Why, the best of us have used up every metal that the earth produces without arriving, though I grant you we have come very near it, yet without arriving at perfection; and here's an Englishman only asks for a ton or so of paper, a Government stamp, and —presto!—with a stroke of the pen he turns it all to gold."

"Have you, too, bought Mississippi Stock?" asked the signor eagerly. "Then the scheme is prospering, the shares will rise once more. It is good to hold on!"

"Not quite such a fool!" answered the abbé; and Bartoletti's swarthy face fell several inches, for he had a high opinion of his visitor's financial perceptions.

"And yet the Rue Quincampoix was so thronged yesterday, I was compelled to leave my coach, and bid my lackeys force a passage for me through the crowd," urged the signor. "Madame was there, and the Duc du Maine, and more peers of France than you would see at the council. There *must* be life in it! All the world cannot be dupes. And yet the shares have fallen even since this morning."

"All the world are not likely to be on the winning side," replied the abbé quietly, "or who would be left to pay the stakes? From whom do you suppose Monsieur Las makes his profits? You know he has bought the Hôtel Mazarin. You know he has bought Count de Tessé's house, furniture, pictures, plate, and all, even to the English carriage-horses that his coachman does not know how to drive. Where do you suppose the money comes from? When a society of people are engaged in eating one another, it seems to me that the emptiest stomach has the best chance."

His listener looked thoughtfully on his scorched, scarred fingers. It might be that he reflected in how many ways he had burnt them.

"What would you advise me to do?" he asked, after a

[1] A national banking scheme was about this period proposed to the Regent of France by a financial speculator of Scottish extraction named Law.

pause, during which he had filled and emptied a goblet of the red wine that stood at his elbow.

"Realise," was the answer. "Realise, and without delay. The game is like tennis, and must be played with the same precision. If your ball be not taken at the first rebound, its force is so deadened that your utmost skill falls short of cutting it over the net."

The abbé's metaphor, drawn from that fashionable pastime which had been a favourite amusement of the late king, was not without its effect on his listener. Like a skilful practitioner, he suffered his advice to sink into the adept's mind before he took advantage of its effects. In other sciences besides chemistry and cookery, it is well to let your ingredients simmer undisturbed in the crucible till they are thoroughly fused and amalgamated.

He wanted the signor malleable, and nothing, he knew by experience, rendered Bartoletti so obliging as a conviction that he lacked means to provide for his self-indulgence. Like the general public, he had been tempted by the great Mississippi scheme, and had invested in its shares the small amount of ready money at his command. It was gradually dawning on him that his speculations would entail considerable loss—that loss he felt, and showed he felt, must be made good. This was the abbé's opportunity. He could offer his own price now for the co-operation of his friend.

"We are wasting time sadly," said the visitor, after a pause. "Let us go to our studies at once," and he led the way to an inner apartment, as though he had been host and teacher rather than visitor and disciple.

The signor followed, obedient though unwilling, like a well-trained dog bid to heel by its master. Malletort turned his cuffs back, seized a small pair of bellows, and blew a heap of powdered coal, mingled with other substances, into a deep violet glow.

"By the bye," he asked, as if suddenly recollecting something of no importance, "have you ever had any dealings with negroes? Do you know anything of the superstitions of Obi?"

"I know something of every superstition in the world," answered the other, "Christian as well as Pagan, or how could I afford to drink such wine as you tasted in the next room?"

He laughed while he spoke, heartily enough, and so did Malletort, only the mirth of the latter was assumed. He believed in very little, this abbé, very little indeed, either for

good or evil; but he would have liked, if he could, to believe in the philosopher's stone.

"I have made acquaintance with an Obi-woman lately," pursued he; "she may be useful to us both. I will bring her to see you in a day or two, if you will refresh your mind in the meantime with what you can remember of their mysteries, so as to meet her on equal terms."

Bartoletti looked much relieved, and indeed gratified, when informed that this Obi-woman, instead of being a hideous old negress, was a fine-looking quadroon.

"Is that all you wanted?" said he quite briskly; but his countenance fell once more on perceiving that the abbé made no preparations for departure.

"Not quite," replied the latter. "I am hardly perfect yet in the nature of those essences we studied at my last lesson. Let us go over their powers and properties again."

The signor turned a shade paler, but taking down some phials, and two or three papers of powders from a shelf, he did as he was bid, and proceeded systematically enough to explain their contents, gaining confidence, and even growing enthusiastic in his subject as he went on. At the third packet the abbé stopped him.

"It is harmless, you say, as a perfume when sprinkled in the form of a powder?"

The signor nodded.

"But a deadly poison, mixed with three drops of St. Mark's balsam?"

"Right!" assented the Italian.

"And combined with any vegetable substance, its very odour would be dangerous and even fatal to animal life?"

"You are an apt pupil," said the other, not without approval, though he turned paler still. "It took me seven weeks' close study, and a hundred experiments, to find that out."

"You worked with the glass mask on, of course," continued the abbé; "what would have been the effect had you inhaled the odour?"

"I should have come out in red spots at the first inspiration, turned black at the second, and at the third, monsieur l'abbé, should have been lost to the world, to science, and to you," was the conclusive reply.

"I am not quite satisfied yet," said Malletort. "I will take a packet home with me for further examination, if you please, and ten drops of St. Mark's balsam as well."

"It is worth a thousand francs a drop," observed the adept,

producing at the same time a tiny sealed phial from a drawer under his hand.

"Of course you name your own price," replied Malletort, snatching up his purchase with impatience, and leaving in its place a purse through which the gold shone temptingly, and which clanked down on the table as if the weight of its lining was satisfactory enough.

The two men seemed to understand each other, for almost before the signor's grasp was on the purse, his visitor had left the house; but Bartoletti, locking up the drawer, returned to his gaudy sitting-room, with a twitching lip and a cold sweat bursting from his brow. Till the adept had summoned his theatrical footman, and ordered another flagon of the red wine, he gasped and panted like a man awaking from a nightmare; nor did he recover his equanimity till the flagon was three parts emptied. By that time, however, he was scarce in a condition to pursue his researches after the philosopher's stone.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREY MUSKETEERS

A BUGLER, thirteen years of age, and about three feet high, a veritable child of the regiment, was blowing the assembly for the Grey Musketeers with a vigour that made itself heard through the adjoining Faubourg. The miniature soldier, who had already smelt powder, strutted and swelled like a bantam-cock. His plumage, too, was nearly as gorgeous, and he seemed more than satisfied with himself and his advantages. In no other country, perhaps, could a combination so ridiculous, yet so admirable, have been found as in this union of innocence and precocity; this simplicity of the child, underlying the bearing of a giant, the courage of a hero, and the coquetry of a girl.

Ten minutes precisely were allowed by the regulations of the late king between the mustering call and the "fall in," or final summons for the men to take their places in the ranks. The musketeers lounged and straggled over their parade-ground, laughing, chatting, bantering each other; fastening here a buckle, there a shoulder-strap; humming snatches of bivouac songs, fixing flints, adjusting belts, and pulling their long moustaches, as they conversed, disrespectfully enough it must be admitted, in hoarse, short murmurs, of Vendôme, Villeroy, Staremberg, Prince Eugene, Malbrook, the great military authorities of the day, and how old Turenne would have *arranged* them one and all.

The Grey Musketeers were so called from their uniform, which, except for its sober hue, shone as splendid as was compatible with the possibility of manœuvring. The men were all veterans; that is to say, had fought through one or more campaigns, so that many a young, delicate face in the ranks was seamed and scarred by the shot and shell of the enemy. The majority, however, were grim, and grey, and bronzed; men who could eat ammunition-bread and sutlers' beef without fear of colic; who could sleep round a bivouac fire, and rise refreshed and ready to be killed; who had

looked death in the face and laughed at him in a score of fields. A large proportion were of noble birth, and all were at home in the drawing-room, the refinements and delicate airs of which it was their affectation to carry with them under fire. They could be rough and out-spoken enough, jesting with each other over the wine-cup, or arguing as now while waiting for parade; but put them before an enemy, the nearer the better, and they became lambs—ladies—perfect dancing-masters in the postures and graces they assumed. If the baggage was not too far in the rear, they dressed and scented themselves for a battle as for a ball. They flourished lace handkerchiefs, wore white gloves, and took snuff from gold boxes in the act of advancing to charge a column or to storm a battery. Marlborough's grenadiers had many a tussle with them, and loved them dearly.

"Close in, Jack," these honest fellows would say to each other, when they saw the laced hats, with their jaunty grey cockades, advancing through the smoke. "There'll be wigs on the green now—here's the Dandies a-coming!"

And in good truth, ere the Dandies and they parted, many a comely head was down to rise no more.

There were several companies of these picked troops, distinguished by the different colours of their uniforms. It was their pride to vie with each other in daring, as in extravagance and dissipation. If a post were unusually formidable, a battery in a peculiarly strong position, one or other of these companies, black, red, or grey, would entreat permission to storm it. The Grey Musketeers had of late esteemed themselves very fortunate in opportunities for leaving half their number dead on the field. They were commanded by the young officer whose acquaintance Madame de Montmirail made during the stag-hunt at Fontainebleau. Captain George, as he was called, had obtained this enviable post, no less by skill and conspicuous bravery, than by great good luck, and perhaps, though last not least, by an affectation of coolness in danger, so exaggerated as to be sublime while it was ridiculous. The little bugler was waiting for him now. When the ten minutes should have elapsed, and the silver lace on the captain's uniform come gleaming round the corner, he was prepared to blow his heroic soul into the mouthpiece of his instrument. Meanwhile he stood aloof from his comrades. He looked so much taller thus than when oppressed by comparison with those full-grown warriors. The men were grouped about in knots, talking idly enough on indifferent subjects. Presently the majority gathered

round a fresh arrival—a tall, forbidding-looking soldier, with iron-grey moustaches that nearly reached his elbows—who seemed to have some important news to communicate. As the circle of his listeners increased, there was obviously a growing interest and excitement in his intelligence.

"Who is it?" panted one, hurrying up.

"Killed?" asked another, tightening his sword-belt, and twisting his moustaches fiercely to his eyes.

"It's a credit to the bourgeois!" "It's a disgrace to the corps!" exclaimed a couple in a breath; while, "Tell us all about it, Bras-de-Fer!" from half a dozen eager voices at once, served to hush the noisy assemblage into comparative silence. Bras-de-Fer was nothing loth. A pompous old soldier, more of a martinet and less of a dandy perhaps than most of his audience, he loved, above all things, to hear himself speak. He was a notorious duellist, moreover, and a formidable swordsman, whence the nickname by which he was known among his comrades. He entered on his recital with all the zest of a professor.

"I was sitting," said he, with an air of grave superiority, "immediately in front of the coffee-house Louis Quatorze, a little after watch-setting. I was improving my knowledge of my profession by studying the combinations in a game of dominoes. By myself, Adolphe? Yes—right hand against left. Yet not altogether by myself, for I had a bottle of great Bordeaux wine—there is nothing to laugh at, gentlemen—on the table in my front. Flanconnade had just entered, and called for a measure of lemonade, when a street-boy began singing a foolish song about the Regent, with a jingle of 'tra-la-la,' 'débonnaire,' and some rubbish of that kind. Now this poor Flanconnade, you remember, comrades, never was a great admirer of the Regent. He used to say, we Musketeers of the Guard owed allegiance, first, to the young king, then to the Duc du Maine, lastly to the Marshal de Villeroy, and that we should take our orders only from those three."

"So we do! So we should!" interrupted a dozen voices. But Bras-de-Fer, raising a brown, sinewy hand, imposed silence by the gesture, and continued.

"Flanconnade, therefore, was displeased at the air of gasconnade with which the urchin sang his song. 'What! thou, too, art a little breechless roué of the Regent!' said he, turning round from his drink, and applying a kick that sent the boy howling across the street. There was an outcry directly amongst the cuckold citizens in the coffee-house;

half of them, I have no doubt, were grocers and haberdashers in the Regent's employ. 'Shame! shame!' they exclaimed. 'Down with the bully!' 'Long live the Grey Musketeers!' I was up, and had put on my hat, you may well believe, gentlemen, at the first alarm; but with their expression of goodwill to the corps, I sat down again and uncovered. It was simply a personal matter for Flanconnade, and I knew no man better able to extricate himself from such an affair. So, leaving the dominoes, I filled my glass and waited for the result. Our friend looked about him from one to the other, like a man who seeks an antagonist, but the bourgeoisie avoided his glances, all but one young man, wrapped in a cloak, who had seemed at first to take little part in the disturbance. Flanconnade, seeing this, stared him full in the face, and observed, 'Monsieur made a remark? Did I understand clearly what it was?'

"'I said *shame!*' replied the other boldly. 'And I repeat, monsieur is in the wrong.'"

"By this time the bystanders had gathered round, and I heard whispers of—'Mind what you do; it's a Grey Musketeer, fighting is his trade;' and such friendly warnings; while old Bouchon rushed in with his face as white as his apron, and taking the youth by the arm, exclaimed, in trembling accents, 'Do you know what you're about, in Heaven's name? It's Flanconnade, I tell you. It's the fencing-master to the company!' Our poor friend appeared so pleased with this homage that I almost thought he would be pacified; but you remember his maxim—'Put yourself in the right first, and then keep your arm bent and your point low.' He acted on it now. 'Monsieur is prepared for results?' he asked quietly; and raising the tumbler in his hand, dashed its contents into his antagonist's face."

There was a murmur of applause amongst the musketeers, for whom such an argument combined all the elements of reasoning, and Bras-de-Fer proceeded.

"I rose now, for I saw the affair would march rapidly. 'It is good lemonade,' said the young man, licking his lips, while he wiped the liquor from his face. 'Monsieur has given me a lesson in politeness. He will permit me in return to demand five minutes' attention while I teach him to dance.' The youth's coolness, I could not but admit, was that of a well-bred man, and surprised me the more because, when he opened his cloak to get at his handkerchief, I perceived he wore no weapon, and was dressed in plain dark garments like a scholar or a priest. Flanconnade winked at me.

There was plenty of moonlight in the garden behind the coffee-house, but there were two difficulties—the youth had no second and no sword.

"By great good fortune, at this moment in stepped young Château-Guerrand of the Duc du Maine's dragoons, with his arm still in a sling, from the wound he received at Brighuega, when serving on his uncle's staff. He had been supping with the prince-marshal, and of course was in full-dress, with a rapier at his belt. He accepted the duty willingly, and lent our youth the weapon he could not use. We measured their swords. They were right to a hair's-breadth, but that the guard of Château-Guerrand's hilt was open; and as he and I could not possibly exchange a pass or two for love, we set ourselves to watch the affair with interest, fearing only that Flanconnade's skill would finish it almost ere it had well commenced.

"The moon was high, and there was a beautiful fighting-light in the garden. At twenty paces I could see the faces of the guests and servants quite distinctly, as they crowded the back-door and windows of the house. We placed the adversaries at open distance on the level. They saluted and put themselves on guard. The moment I saw the young man's hand up, I knew there would be a fight for it. I observed that his slight frame was exceedingly muscular, and though he looked very pale, almost white in the moonlight, his eyes glittered and his face lost all its gravity when the blades touched. I was sure the rogue loved the steel-clink in his heart. Moreover, he must have been *there* before. He neglected no precaution. He seemed to know the whole game. He bound his handkerchief round his fingers, to make up for Château-Guerrand's open sword-hilt, and feeling some inequality of ground beneath his feet, he drew his adversary inch by inch, till he got him exactly level with his point. Flanconnade's face showed me that he was aware of his antagonist's force. After two passes, he tried his own peculiar plunging thrust in tierce (I never was quick enough for it myself, and always broke ground when I saw it coming), but this youth parried it in carte. In carte! by Heavens! and Flanconnade was too good a fencer to dare try it again."

"In carte!" repeated the listeners, with varied accents of interest and admiration. "It's incredible!" "It's beautiful!" "That is *real* fencing, and no sabre-play!" "Go on! Flanconnade had met with his match!"

"More than his match," resumed Bras-de-Fer. "In a

dozen passes he was out of breath, and this youth had never moved a foot after his first traverse. I tell you his defence was beautiful; so close you could hardly see his wrist move, and he never straightened his arm but twice. The first time Flanconnade leaped out of distance, for it was impossible to parry the thrust; although, as far as I could see, he made a simple disengagement and came in outside. But the next time he drew our comrade six inches nearer, and I knew by his face he was as certain as I was that he had got him at last. Bah! One — two! That simple disengagement — a lunge home; and I saw six inches of Château-Guerrand's sword through our poor comrade's back ere he went down. The youth wiped it carefully before he returned it, with a profusion of thanks, and found time, while Bouchon and his people gathered round the fallen man, to express his regrets with a perfect politeness to myself. 'Monsieur,' said he, 'I am distressed to think your friend will not profit by the lesson he has had the kindness to accept. I am much afraid he will never dance again.'"

"And where was the thrust?" asked Adolphe, a promising young fencer, who had been listening to the recital of the duel, open-mouthed.

"Through the upper lung," answered Bras-de-Fer. "In five minutes Flanconnade was as dead as Louis Quatorze! Here comes the captain, gentlemen. It is time to fall in."

While he finished speaking, the little bugler blew an astonishing volume of sound through his instrument. The musketeers fell into their places. The line was dressed with military accuracy. The standard of France was displayed; the ranks were opened, and Captain George walked through them, scanning each individual of that formidable band with a keen rapid glance that would have detected a speck on steel, a button awry, a weapon improperly handled, as surely as such breach of discipline would have been summarily visited with a sharp and galling reprimand. Nevertheless, these men were his own associates and equals; many of them his chosen friends. Hardly one but had interchanged with him acts of courtesy and kindness at the bivouac or on the march. Some had risked life for him; others he had rescued from death in the field. In half an hour all would be on a footing of perfect equality once more, but now, Captain George was here to command and the rest to obey. Such was the discipline of the Grey Musketeers. A discipline they were never tired of extolling, and believed to be unequalled in the whole of the armies of Europe.

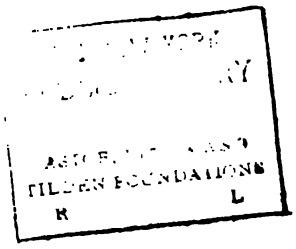
peaceful apartments would have been adorned by pictures, vases, or other works of art. One or two military maps, and a model of some fortified place in Flanders, denoted a tendency to the theoretical as well as practical branches of his profession; and a second regimental suit of grey velvet, almost covered with silver lace, hanging on a chair, showed that its gaudier exigences, so important in the musketeers, were not forgotten. There were also two or three somewhat incongruous articles littered about amongst the paraphernalia of the soldier—such as a chart of the Caribbean Sea, another of the Channel, with its various soundings pricked off in red ink, a long nautical telescope, and a model of a brigantine more than half rigged. Captain George was possessed of certain seafaring tastes and habits picked up in early life, and to which he still clung with as much of sentiment as was compatible with his character. He was not an impressionable person, this musketeer; but if a foreign shoot could once be grafted on his affections, it took root and became gradually a part of the actual tree itself: then it could neither be torn out nor pruned away. Youthful associations, with such a disposition, attained a power hardly credible to those who only knew the external strength and hardness of the man.

Captain George's predilections, however, seemed to be at present completely engrossed by his breakfast. Venison steaks and a liberal flagon of Medoc stood before him; he applied himself to each with a vigorous industry that denoted good teeth, good will, and good digestion. He was so intent on business that a knock at his door was twice repeated ere he answered it, and then the "Come in!" sounded hardly intelligible, hampered as were the syllables by the process of mastication. At the summons, however, Bras-de-Fer entered, and stood opposite his captain. The latter nodded, pointed to a seat, pushed a plate and wine-cup across the table, and continued his repast. Bras-de-Fer had already breakfasted once; nevertheless he sat down and made almost as good play as his entertainer for about ten minutes, when they stopped simultaneously. Then Captain George threw himself back in his chair, loosened his belt, undid the two lower buttons of his heavily-laced grey *just-au-corps*, and passing the Medoc, now at low ebb, to his comrade, asked abruptly—

"Have you found him?"

"And brought him with me, my captain," answered Bras-de-Fer. "He is at this moment waiting outside. 'Tis a queer lad, certainly. He was reading a Latin book when

'You wish to join the Musketeers?'


TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

I came upon him. He would have no breakfast, nor even taste a pot of wine with me as we walked along. Bah! The young ones are not what they used to be in my time."

"I shouldn't mind a few recruits of your sort still," answered his captain good-humouredly. "That thick head of yours is pretty strong, both inside and out; nevertheless, we must take them as we find them, and I should not like to miss a blade that could out-manœuvre poor Flanconnade. If he joins, I would give him the appointment. What think you, Bras-de-Fer? Would he like to be one of us? What did he say?"

"Say!" repeated the veteran; "I couldn't understand half he said—I can't make him out, my captain. I tell you that I, Bras-de-Fer of the Grey Musketeers, am unable to fathom this smooth-faced stripling. Eyes like a girl's, yet quick and true as a hawk's; white delicate hands, but a wrist of steel, that seems to move by machinery. Such science, too! and such style! Who taught him? Then he rambles so in his talk, and wept when I told him our fencing-master never spoke after that disengagement. Only a simple disengagement, my captain; he makes no secret of it. I asked him myself. And he wouldn't taste wine—not a mouthful—not a drop—though I offered to treat him!"

And Bras-de-Fer shook his head solemnly, with something of a monkey's expression who has got a nut too hard to crack. Captain George cut short his friend's reflections by calling for a servant.

"There is a gentleman outside," said he, when the lackey appeared. "Ask his pardon for keeping him waiting, and beg him to step in."

The well-drilled lackey, all politeness, threw the door open for the visitor, who entered with a diffident bow and a timid hesitating step. Bras-de-Fer could not help remarking how much less assured was his manner now than when he crossed swords last night with the best fencer in the company. The musketeers both rose at his entrance, and all three continued standing during the interview. Captain George scanned the new-comer from head to foot, and from foot to head, as a sergeant inspects a recruit. Its subject blushed painfully during the examination. Then the officer inquired abruptly—

"You wish to join the musketeers? As a cadet, of course?"

Something stern in the tone recalled the youth's firmness, and he answered, boldly enough—

"Under certain circumstances—yes."

"Your name?"

"Eugène Beaudésir."

"Your age?"

"More than twenty-five."

The musketeers exchanged looks. He did not appear nearly so much. Captain George continued—

"Your certificates of baptism and gentle birth?"

Again the young man changed colour. He hesitated—he looked down—he seemed ill at ease.

"You need not produce these if other particulars are satisfactory," observed the captain, with a certain rough sympathy which won him a gratitude he little suspected; far more, indeed, than it deserved.

"Reach me that muster-roll, Bras-de-Fer," continued the officer. "We can put his name down, at least for the present, as a cadet. The rest will come in time. But look you, young sir," he added, turning sharply round on the recruit; "before going through any more formalities, I have still a few questions to ask. Answer them frankly, or decline to answer at all."

The visitor bowed and stole another look in his questioner's face. Frank, romantic, impressionable, he had become strangely prepossessed with this manly, soldier-like captain of musketeers—younger in years than himself, yet so many more steps up the social ladder, he thought, than he could now ever hope to reach.

"I will answer," he said, with a hesitation and simplicity almost boyish, yet engaging in its helplessness,—"if you will promise not to use my answers to my injury, and to take me all the same."

Captain George smiled good-humouredly.

"Once on the roll of the King's Musketeers," he replied, "you are amenable to none but his Majesty and your own officers. As we say ourselves, you need fear neither duke nor devil."

The other looked somewhat relieved, and glancing at Bras-de-Fer, observed timidly—

"I had a misfortune last night. It was a broil I could not avoid without great dishonour. I killed my adversary, I fear—and—and—he belongs to your company."

"So it is reported to me," answered the captain coolly; "and if you are capable, it may perhaps be your good fortune to find yourself promoted at last into his place."

Beaudésir looked as if he scarcely understood, and Bras-de-Fer gladly seized the opportunity to explain.

"You do not know us yet, young man. In a short time you will be better acquainted with the constitution and discipline of the Grey Musketeers. It is our study, you will find, to become the best fencers in the French army. To this end we appoint our fencing-master by competition, and he is always liable to be superseded in favour of a successful adversary. It cost Flanconnade twenty-three duels to obtain his grade, and in his last affair—(pardon—I should say his *last but one*) he killed his man. You, monsieur, have disposed of Flanconnade scientifically, I must admit, and our captain here is likely enough to promote you to the vacant post."

"Horror!" exclaimed Beaudésir, shuddering. "Like the priests of Aricia!"

It was now Bras-de-Fer's turn to be puzzled, but he rose to the occasion. Quaffing the remains of the Medoc, he nodded approvingly, and repeated—

"Like the priests of Aricia. The same system precisely as established by His Holiness the Pope. It works remarkably well in the Grey Musketeers."

Beaudésir looked at the captain, and said in a low, agitated voice—

"I am most anxious to serve under you. I can be faithful, attentive—above all, obedient. I have no friends, no resources, nothing to care for. I only wish for an honest livelihood and an honourable death."

"We can find you both, I doubt not," answered George, carelessly opening once more the muster-roll of the company. "I have your name down and your age; no further particulars. Where were you educated?"

"In a school of silence, vigilance, self-restraint, and implicit obedience," answered the recruit.

"Good," observed his captain; "but we must put down a name."

"At Avranches, in Normandy," said the other, after a moment's hesitation.

George closed the roll. "Enough for the present," said he; "and now tell me, monsieur, as between friends, where did you learn to fence with so much address?"

"Wherever I could find a foil with a button on," was the reply. "I never had a naked sword in my hand till last night."

Something in the ready simplicity of such an answer pleased the captain of musketeers, while it interested him still more in his recruit.

"You must be careful of your parries amongst your new comrades," said he; "at least till you have measured the force of each. I warn you fairly, one-half the company will want to try your mettle, and the other half to learn your secret, even at the cost of an awkward thrust or two. In the meantime, let us see what you can do. There are a brace of foils in the cupboard there. Bras-de-Fer, will you give him a benefit?"

But Bras-de-Fer shook his head. What he had seen the night before had inspired him with an extraordinary respect for the youth's prowess, and being justly vain of his own skill, he was averse to expose his inferiority in the science of defence before his captain. He excused himself, therefore, on the ground of rheumatism which had settled in an old wound. Captain George did not press the veteran, but opening the cupboard, pulled out the foils, presented one to his visitor, and put himself in position with the other. Beaudésir performed an elaborate salute with such grace and precision as showed him a perfect master of his weapon. He then threw his foil in the air, caught it by the blade, and returned it courteously to the captain. But George was not yet satisfied.

"One assault at least," said he, stamping his right foot. "I want to see if I cannot find a parry for this famous thrust of yours."

The other smiled quietly and took his ground. Though within a few inches of the chamber-door, he seemed to require no more room for his close and quiet evolutions. Ere they had exchanged two passes, the captain came over his adversary's point with a rapid flanking movement, like the stroke of a riding-whip, and lending all the strength of his iron wrist to the jerk, broke the opposing foil short off within six inches of the guard. It was the only resource by which he could escape a palpable hit.

"Enough!" he exclaimed, laughing. "There are no more foils in the cupboard, and I honestly confess I should not wish to renew the contest with the real bloodsuckers. You may be perfectly tranquil as regards your comrades, my friend. I do not know a musketeer in the whole guard that would care to take a lesson from you with the buttons off. What say you, Bras-de-Fer? Come, gentlemen, there is no time to be lost. The Marshal de Villeroy will not yet have left his quarters. Do you, old comrade, take him the fresh appointment for his signature. He never requires to see our recruits till they can wait on him in uniform; and you, young

man, come with me to the Rue des Quatres Fripons, where I will myself order your accoutrements, and see you measured for a *just-au-corps*. Recollect, sir, next to their discipline on parade, I am most particular about the clothes of those I have the honour to command. Slovenliness in a musketeer is a contradiction as impossible as poltroonery; and it is a tradition in our corps, that we never insulted Malbrook's grenadiers by appearing before them in anything but full-dress; or by opening fire until we were close enough for them to mark the embroidery on our waistcoats. I congratulate you, my young friend: you are now a soldier in the pick of that army which is itself the pick of all the armies in the world!"

With such encouraging conversation Captain George led his lately enlisted recruit through a variety of winding streets, thronged at that busy hour with streams of passengers. These, however, for the most part, made way, with many marks of respect, for the officer of musketeers; the women especially, looking back with unfeigned admiration and interest at the pair, according as they inclined to the stately symmetry of the one or the graceful and almost feminine beauty of the other. Perhaps, could they have known that the pale, dark-eyed youth following timidly half a pace behind his leader had only last night killed the deadliest fencer in Paris, they would have wasted no glances even on such a fair specimen of manhood as Captain George, but devoured his comrade with their bold black eyes, in a thrill of mingled horror, interest, and admiration, peculiar to their sex.

To reach the Rue des Quatres Fripons, it was necessary to pass a barrier, lately placed by Marshal de Villeroy's directions, to check the tide of traffic on occasion of the young king's transit through his future capital. This barrier was guarded by a post of Grey Musketeers, and at the moment Captain George approached it, one of his handsomest young officers was performing a series of bows by the door of a ponderous, heavily gilt family coach, and explaining with considerable volubility his own desolation at the orders which compelled him to forbid the advance of this unwieldy vehicle. Six heavy coach-horses, two postilions, a coachman, four footmen, and two outriders, armed to the teeth—all jammed together in a narrow street, with a crowd of bystanders increasing every minute, served to create a sufficient complication, and a very pretty young lady inside, accompanied by one attendant, was already in tears. The

attendant, a dark woman with a scarlet turban, scolded and cursed in excellent French, whilst one of the leaders took immediate advantage of the halt to rear on end and seize his comrade by the crest with a savage and discordant scream.

In such a turmoil it took George a few moments to recognise Madame de Montmirail's liveries, which he knew perfectly well. To his companion, of course, fresh from Avranches, in Normandy, all liveries in Paris must have been equally strange. Nevertheless he followed close behind his leader, who pushed authoritatively through the crowd, and demanded what was the matter. The officer of musketeers, seeing his own captain, fell back from the carriage-door, and Cerise, with her eyes full of tears, found a face she had never forgotten staring in at the window scarcely six inches from her own.

They recognised each other in an instant. For the first sentence it was even "George!" and "Cerise!" Though, of course, it cooled down to "monsieur" and "mademoiselle" as they talked on. She was very little altered, he thought, only taller and much more beautiful; while for her, it was the same brave brown face and kind eyes that she had known by heart since she was a child, only braver, browner, kinder, nobler, just as she had expected. It was wonderful she could see it so distinctly, with her looks cast down on the pretty gloved hands in her lap.

The affair did not take long. "You can pass them by my orders, Adolphe," said his captain; and ere the savage stallion had time for a second attack, the huge vehicle rolled through and lumbered on, leaving handsome Adolphe ejaculating protestations and excuses, believing implicitly that he had won the beautiful mademoiselle's affections at first sight during the process.

Except by this voluble young gentleman, very little had been said. People do say very little when they mean a great deal. It seemed to George, mademoiselle had offered no more pertinent remark than that "She had made a long journey, and was going to the Hôtel Montmirail *to stay*." Whilst Cerise—well, I have no doubt Cerise could have repeated every word of their conversation, yet she did nothing of the kind neither to Célandine then, nor to mamma afterwards; though by the time she reached home her eyes were quite dry, and no wonder, considering the fire in her cheeks. Altogether, the interview was certainly provocative of silence. Neither Captain George nor Beaudésir uttered a syllable during the remainder of their walk. Only

on the threshold of the tailor's shop in the Rue des Quatres Fripons the latter awoke from a deep fit of musing, and asked, very respectfully—

"My captain, do you think I should have got the best of it this morning if we had taken the buttons off the foils?"

CHAPTER X

THE BOUDOIR OF MADAME

THERE was plenty of room in the Hôtel Montmirail when it was opened at night for madame's distinguished receptions. Its screen of lights in front, its long rows of windows, shedding lustrous radiance on the ground and second floors, caused it to resemble, from outside, the enchanted palace of the White Cat, in that well-known fairy-tale which has delighted childhood for so many generations. Within, room after room stretched away in long perspective, one after another, more polished, more decorated, more shining, each than its predecessor. The waiting-room, the gallery, the reception-room, the dining-hall, the two withdrawing-rooms, all with floors inlaid by the most elaborate and slippery of woodwork, all heavy with crimson velvet and massive gilding in the worst possible taste, all adorned by mythological pictures, bright of colour, cold of tone, and scant of drapery, led the oppressed and dazzled visitor to madame's bedchamber, thrown open like every other apartment on the floor for his or her admiration. Here the eye reposed at last, on flowers, satin, ivory, mirrors, crystal, china—everything most suggestive of the presence of beauty, its influence and the atmosphere that seems to surround it in its home. The bed, indeed, with lofty canopy, surmounted by ciphers and coronets, was almost solemn in its magnificence; but the bath of madame, her wardrobe, above all, her toilet-table, modified with their graceful, glittering elegance the oppressive grandeur of this important article in a sleeping-apartment.

At each of the four corners strips of looking-glass reached from ceiling to floor, while opposite the bed, the first object on which madame's eyes rested in waking, was a picture that conveyed much delicate and appropriate flattery to herself. It represented the Judgment of Paris. That dangerous

shepherd of Mount Ida was depicted in appropriate costume of brown skin, laughing eyes, a crook, and a pair of sandals, with a golden apple in his hand. Juno stood on one side—Minerva on the other. The ox-eyed goddess, with her rich colouring and radiant form, affording a glowing type of those attractions which are dependent on the senses alone; while Minerva's deep grey eyes, serene, majestic air, and noble, thoughtful brow, seemed to promise a triumph, glorious in proportion to the wisdom and intellect to be overcome. Paris stood between them, somewhat in front of the immortal rivals, his right arm skilfully foreshortened, and offering the apple—to whom? To neither of these, but to the marquise, as she got out of bed every morning; thereby inferring that *she* was the Olympian Venus, the Queen of Love and Beauty both for gods and men! Malletort, in his many visits to the Hôtel Montmirail, never passed this picture without a characteristic grin of intense amusement and delight.

Traversing the bedchamber, one arrived at last in a small apartment which concluded the series, and from which there appeared no further egress, though, in truth, a door, concealed in the panelling, opened on a narrow staircase which descended to the garden. This room was more plainly furnished than the others, but an air of comfort pervaded it that denoted the owner's favourite retreat. Its tables were littered, its furniture was worn. The pens and portfolio were disordered; a woman's glove lay near the inkstand; some half-finished embroidery occupied the sofa; and a sheet of blotted music had fallen on the floor. There was no kind of mirror in any part of the apartment. It was an affectation of the marquise, pardonable enough in a handsome woman, to protest that she hated the reflection of her own features; and this little chamber was her favourite retreat—her inner citadel, her sanctuary of seclusion — or, as the servants called it, the boudoir of madame.

It was undoubtedly the quietest room in the house, the farthest removed from the noise of the courtyard, the domestics, even their guests. Profound silence would have reigned in it now, but for the ring of a hooked hard beak drawn sharply at intervals across a row of gilt wires, and a ghastly muttering, like that of a demoniac, between whisper and croak, for the encouragement of somebody or something named "Pierrot." This was madame's West Indian parrot, beguiling his solitude by the conscientious study of his part. Presently the bird gave a long shrill whistle, for he heard a

well-known step on the garden stair, and his mistress's voice singing—

" Non, je te dis
Ma sœur, c'est lui,
C'est mon Henri,
A l'habit gris
Des Mousquetaires, des Mousquetaires,
Des Mousquetaires
Du roi Louis.

Amant gentil
Qui chante, qui rit,
Joli, poli,
Fidèle? Mais, Oui
Comme Mousquetaire, comme Mousquetaire,
Comme Mousquetaire,
Du roi Louis."

At which conclusive point in its argument Pierrot interrupted the ballad with a deafening shriek, and madame, sliding the panel back, passed into the apartment.

She was dressed in a simple morning toilet of white, with scarlet breast-knots, and a ribbon of the same colour gathering the shining masses of her black hair. It suited her well. Even Pierrot, gazing at her with head on one side, and upturned eye, seemed to be of this opinion, though bigger and better talkers by rote had probably long ago informed her of the fact. She had a large bouquet of flowers, fresh gathered, in her hand, and she gave the bird a caressing word or two as she moved through her boudoir, disposing of them here and there to the best advantage; then she selected a few of the rarest, and put them carefully in water, telling the parrot " these are for Cerise, Pierrot," and endeavouring to make it repeat her daughter's name. Of course, without success; though on other occasions this refractory pupil would shriek these well-known syllables, time after time, till the very cook, far off in the basement, was goaded to swear hideously, wishing in good Gascon he had the accursed fowl picked and trussed and garnished with olives in the stew-pan.

Cerise had been brought back from her pension in Normandy, as we have seen, partly by Malletort's advice, partly because her mother longed to have the girl by her side once more. They had been inseparable formerly, and it is possible she was conscious, without confessing it, that her whole character deteriorated during her daughter's absence. So the heavy family coach, postilions, outriders, footmen, and all, rolled into the courtyard of the Hôtel Montmirail,

after a slight delay, as we have seen, at one of the barriers, and deposited its freight to the great jubilation of the whole household. These were never tired of praising mademoiselle's beauty, mademoiselle's grace—her refinement, her manners, her acquirements, her goodness of heart, were on every lip. But though she said less about it than the domestics, nobody in her establishment was so alive to the merits of Cerise as her mother. In good truth, the marquise loved her daughter very dearly. She never thought she could love anything half so much, except—except perhaps, the germ of a new idea that had lately been forming itself in her heart, and of which the vague shadowy uncertainty, the shame, the excuses, the unwillingness with which she acknowledged it, constituted no small portion of the charm. Is it possible that Love is painted blind because, if people could see before them, they would never be induced to move a step along the pleasant path? The pleasant path that leads through cool shades and clustering roses, down the steep bank where the nettles grow, through briar and bramble, to end at last in a treacherous morass, whence extrication is generally difficult, sometimes impossible, and always unpleasant. Nevertheless, to get Cerise back from her pension, to find that she had grown into a woman, yet without losing the child's blue eyes, fond and frank and innocent as ever — to watch her matured intellect, to feel that the plaything was a companion now, though playful and light-hearted still — lastly, to discover that she was a beauty, but a beauty who could never become a rival, because in quite a different style from her mother—all this was very delightful, and the marquise, seldom low-spirited at any time, had become perfectly sparkling since her daughter came home. So she carolled about the boudoir like a girl, coaxing Pierrot, arranging the flowers, and warning Célandine, between the notes of her foolish love-song, not to let mademoiselle's chocolate get cold. Mademoiselle, you see, was tired and not yet down; indeed, to tell the truth, not yet up, but pressing a soft flushed cheek against her laced pillow, having just awoke from a dream, in which she was back at the convent in Normandy once more, sauntering down the beech-walk with her director, who somehow, instead of a priest's habit, wore the uniform of the Grey Musketeers, an irregularity that roused the wrath of the Lady Superior and made her speak out freely; whereat the musketeer took his pupil's part, looking down on her with a brave brown face and kind eyes, while he clasped her hand in fond assurance of his aid. Waking thus,

she tried hard to get back to sleep, in hopes of dreaming it all over again.

The mother, meanwhile, having disposed her chamber to her liking, sank into the recesses of a deep arm-chair, and began to speculate on her daughter's future. It is not to be supposed that such an important consideration as the child's marriage now occupied her attention for the first time. Indeed her habits, her education, the opinions of that society in which she lived, even her own past, with its vicissitudes and experiences, seemed to urge on her the necessity of taking some step towards an early settlement in life for her attractive girl. Cerise was beautiful, no doubt, thought the marquise; not indeed in her mother's wicked, provoking style, of which that mother well knew the power, but with the innocent beauty of an angel. At such a Court, it was good she should be provided as soon as possible with a legitimate protector. Of suitors there would be no lack, for two strains of the best blood in France united in the person of this fair damsel, whose wealth, besides, would make her a desirable acquisition to the noblest gentleman in the realm. Then she reviewed in turn all the eligible matches she could think of in the large circle of her acquaintance; scanning them mentally, one after another, with the proverbial fastidiousness that, looking for a perfectly straight stick, traverses the wood from end to end in vain. The first man was too young, the second too old, a third too clever, a fourth too stupid. Count Point d'Appui had been hawked at by all the beauties in Paris, and owned half Picardy; but she was afraid of him. No, she could not trust him with her Cerise. He was worn out, debauched, one of the roués, and worse than the Regent! Then there was the Marquis de la Force Manquée, he would have been the very thing, but he had sustained a paralytic stroke. Ah! she knew it. The family might hush it up, talk of a fall in hunting, a shock to the system, a cold bath after exercise, but Fagon had told her what it was. The late king's physician should understand such matters, and she was not to be deceived! To be sure, there was still the Duc de Beaublafard left—noble rank, tolerable possessions, easy temper, and a taste for the fine arts. She wavered a long time, but decided against him at last.

"It is a pity!" said the marquise, in a half-whisper, shaking her head, and gazing thoughtfully at Pierrot; "a thousand pities! but I dare not risk it. He is too good-looking—even for a lover—decidedly for a husband!"

It was strange that, with her knowledge of human nature,

her experience, by observation at least, of human passions, she should so little have considered that person's inclinations who ought to have been first consulted in such a matter. She never seemed to contemplate for an instant that Cerise herself might shrink from the character of the count, appeal against becoming sick-nurse to the marquis, or incline to the excessive and objectionable beauty of the duke. It seemed natural the girl should accept her mother's choice just as that mother had herself accepted, without even seeing him, the chivalrous old Montmirail whom she had so cherished and respected, whose snuff-box stood there under glass on her writing-table, and for whom, though he had been dead more years than she liked to count, she sometimes felt as if she could weep even now.

Such a train of reflection gradually brought the marquise to her own position in life, and a calculation of the advantages and disadvantages attendant on marriage as regarded herself. She could not but know she was in the full meridian of her beauty. Her summer, so to speak, was still in its July; the fruit bright, glowing, and mature; not a leaf yet changed in colour with forewarning of decay. She might take her choice of a dozen noble names whenever she would, and she felt her heart beat while she wondered why this consideration should of late have been so often present to her mind. It could only arise from an anxiety to settle Cerise, she argued with herself; there *could* be no other reason. Impossible! absurd! No—no—a thousand times—No! She went carefully back over her past life, analysing, with no foolish, romantic tendencies, but in a keen, impartial spirit, the whole history of her feelings. She acknowledged, with a certain hard triumph, that in her young days she had never loved. Likings, flirtations, passing fancies she had indulged in by hundreds, a dozen at a time, but to true feminine affection her nearest approach had been that sentiment of regard which she entertained for her husband. She did not stop to ask herself if this was love, as women understand the word.

And was she to be always invulnerable? Was she indeed incapable of that abstraction, that self-devotion which made the happiness and the misery of nearly all her sex? She did ask herself this question, but she did *not* answer it; though Pierrot, still watching her out of one eye, must have seen her blush. Certainly, none of her declared suitors had hitherto inspired it. Least of all, he to whom the world had lately given her as his affianced wife. Brave he was, no doubt,

chivalrous in thought and action; stupid enough besides; yes, quite stupid enough for a husband! generous too, and considerate—but oh! not like the kind, unselfish, indulgent old heart she mourned for in widow's weeds all those years ago. She could almost have cried again now, and yet she laughed when she thought of the united ages of her late husband and her present adorer. Was it her destiny, then, thus ever to captivate the affections of old men? and were their wrongs to be avenged at last by her own infatuation for a lover many years younger than herself? Again the burning blushes rose to her brow, and though Pierrot was the only witness present, she buried her face in her hands.

Lifting her eyes once more, they rested on a picture that held the place of honour in her boudoir. It was a coloured drawing of considerable spirit, and had been given her by no less a favourite than the prince-marshal himself, for whose glorification it had been executed by a rising artist. It represented a battle-field, of which the Prince de Château-Guerrand constituted the principal object; and that officer was portrayed with considerable fidelity, advancing to the succour of the Count de Guiches, who at the head of the Guards was covering Villeroy's retreat before Marlborough at Ramillies. Two or three broad, honest faces of the English grenadiers came well out from the smoke and confusion in the background, ingeniously increased by a fall of rafters and conflagration of an imaginary farmhouse; but the Count de Guiches himself occupied no prominent place in the composition, dancing about on a little grey horse in one corner, as if studious not to interfere with the dominant figure, who was, indeed, the artist's patron, and who presided over the whole in a full-bottomed wig, with a conceited smile on his face and a laced hat in his hand. There lay, also, a dead musketeer in the foreground, admirably contrived to impart reality to the scene of conflict; and it was on this figure that the eyes of the marquise fixed themselves, devouring it with a passionate gaze, in which admiration, longing, self-scorn, and self-reproach, seemed all combined.

For a full minute the wild, pitiful expression never left her face, and during that minute she tore her handkerchief to the coronet near its hem. Then she rose and paced the room for a couple of turns, restless as a leopard; but ere she had made a third, footsteps were heard approaching through the bedchamber. The door opened, and one of her servants announced "Monsieur l'Abbé Malletort!"

CHAPTER XI

WHAT THE SERPENT SAID

HE came in smiling, of course. When was the abbé to be caught without his self-possessed smile, his easy manner, and his carefully arranged dress? On the present occasion he carried with him some rare flowers as well. The marquise sprang at them almost before he had time to offer his elaborate homage, while he bent over her extended hand. He snatched the nosegay away, however, with great quickness, and held it behind his back.

"Pardon, madame," said he, "this is forbidden fruit. As such I bring it into the garden of Paradise; where my cousin dwells there is Eden, and the resemblance is the more striking that neither here are found mirrors to offend me with the reflection of my own ugly face. Consequently, my attention is concentrated on yourself. I look at you, marquise, as Adam looked at Eve. Bah! that father of horticulture was but a husband. I should rather say, as the subtle creature who relieved their domestic *tête-à-tête* looked at the lady presiding over that charming scene. I look at you, I say, with delight and admiration, for I find you beautiful!"

"And is it to tell me this important news that you are abroad so early?" asked the marquise, laughing gaily, while she pointed to the easy-chair she had just left. "Sit down, monsieur l'abbé, and try to talk sense for five minutes. You can be rational; none more so, when you choose. I want your opinion—nay, I even think I want your advice. Mind, I don't promise to take it, that of course! Don't look so interested. It's not about myself. It's about Cerise."

"How can I look anything else?" asked the abbé, whose face, to do him justice, never betrayed his thoughts or feelings. "Madame, or mademoiselle, both are near and dear to me too much so for my own repose."

He sighed, and laid his white hand on his breast. She was so accustomed to his manner that she never troubled herself whether he was in jest or earnest. Moreover, the

was at present engrossed with her daughter's future, and proceeded thoughtfully.

"Cerise is a woman now, my cousin. Her girlhood is past, and she has arrived at an age when every woman should think of establishing herself in life. Pardon! that bouquet is in your way; put it down yonder in the window-sill."

The abbé rose and placed the flowers in the open window, whence a light air from without wafted their sweet and heavy perfume into the apartment. When he reseated himself the marquise had relapsed into silence. She was thinking deeply, with her eyes fixed on the dead musketeer in the picture. The abbé spoke first. He began in a low tone of emotion, that if fictitious, was admirably assumed.

"It is not for me, perhaps, madame, to give an opinion on such matters as concern the affections. For me, the churchman, the celibate, the man of the world, whose whole utility to those he loves depends on subjection of his love at any cost—at any sacrifice; who must trample his feelings under foot, lest they rise and vanquish him, putting him to torture, punishment, and shame. My cousin, have not I seemed to you a man of marble rather than a creature of flesh and blood?"

The marquise opened her black eyes wide. He had succeeded at least in rousing her attention, and continued in the same low, hurried voice.

"Can you not make allowance for a position so constrained and unnatural as mine? Can you not comprehend a devotion that exists out of, and apart from self? Is not the hideous Satyr peering from behind his tree at the nymph whose beauty awes him from approach, an object more touching, more to be respected than vain Narcissus languishing, after all, but for the mere reflection of himself? Is not that a true and faithful worship which seeks only the elevation of its idol, though its own crushed body may be exacted to raise the pedestal, if but by half a foot? Do you believe—I ask you, my cousin, in the utmost truth and sincerity—do you believe there breathes a man on earth so completely consecrated to your interests as myself?"

"You have always been a kind counsellor—and—and—an affectionate kinsman," answered the marquise, a little confused; adding, with an air of frankness that became her well—"Come! abbé, you are a good friend, neither more nor less, staunch, honest, constant. You always have been, you always will be. Is it not so?"

His self-command was perfect. His face betrayed neither disappointment, vexation, nor wounded pride. His voice

retained just so much of tremor as was compatible with the warm regard of friendship, yet not too little to convey the deeper interest of love. He did not approach his cousin by an inch. He sat back in the arm-chair, outwardly composed and tranquil, yet he made it appear that he was pleading a subject of vital importance both to her welfare and his own.

"Pass over me, madame!" he exclaimed, throwing both his white hands up with a conclusive gesture. "Walk over my body without scruple if it will keep you dry-shod. Why am I here; nay, why do I exist at all but to serve you—and yours? Nevertheless, it is not now a question of the daughter's destiny,—that will arrive in course of time,—it is of the mother I would speak. For the mother I would plead, even against myself. What temptation is there in the world like ambition? What has earth to offer compared to its promises? The draught of love may be—nay, I feel too keenly *must* be—very sweet, but what bitter drops are mingled in the cup! Surely I know it; but what matters its taste to me? the abbé! the priest! Marquise, you have a future before you the proudest woman in Europe might envy. That fair hand might hold a sceptre, that sweet brow be encircled by a crown. Bah! they are but baubles, of course," continued the abbé, relapsing without a moment's warning, into his usual tone; "the one would make your arm ache and the other your head; nevertheless, my cousin, you could endure these inconveniences without complaint, perhaps even with patience and resignation to your fate?"

The marquise, it must be confessed, was relieved at his change of tone. Her feelings had been stimulated, her sympathies enlisted, and now her curiosity was aroused. This last quality is seldom weak in her sex, and the abbé, though it is needless to inquire where or how he learned the trade, was far too experienced a practitioner to neglect so powerful an engine as that desire for knowledge which made shipwreck of Eve and is the bane of all her daughters. Madame de Montmirail was proud—most women are. She loved power—most women do. If a thought flashed through her mind that the advancement of her own position might benefit those in whom she felt interest, what was this but a noble instinct, unselfish as are all the instincts of womanhood?

"You speak in parables, my good abbé," said she, with a laugh that betrayed some anxiety to know more. "You talk of crowns and sceptres as familiarly as I do of fans and bracelets. You must expound to me what you mean, for I am one of those who find out a riddle admirably when they have been told the answer."

"I will instruct you, then," was his reply, "in the form of a parable. Listen and learn. A certain sultan had a collection of jewels, and he changed them from time to time—because he could not find a gem that sparkled with equal brilliance by day and by night. So he consulted every jeweller in his dominions, and squandered great sums of money, both in barter and in a search for what he required. Nay, he would trample under foot and defile the treasures he possessed, passionate, languishing, wretched, for want of that he possessed not. So his affairs went to ruin, and his whole country was in want and misery.

"Now, a dervish praying at sunset by a fountain, saw a beautiful bird fly down to the water to drink. Between its eyes grew a jewel that flamed and glittered like the noonday sun on the sultan's drawn scimitar. And the dervish bethought him, this jewel would be a rare addition to the collection of his lord; so he rolled his prayer-carpet into a pillow, and went to sleep by the side of the fountain, under a tree.

"At midnight the dervish woke up to pray, and on the branch above his head he saw something flash and sparkle like the sun on the sultan's scimitar at noonday. So he said, 'This is the gem for which my lord pineth. Lo! I will take the bird captive, and bring it with me to the feet of my lord.' Then the dervish took the bird craftily with his hand, and though the fowl was beautiful, and the gem was precious, he kept neither of them for himself, but brought them both to his lord, to be the delight of the sultan and the salvation of the land."

"And suppose the poor bird would rather have had her liberty?" replied the marquise. "It seems to me that in their dealings with men the birds get the worst of it from first to last."

"This bird was wise in her generation, as the goose that saved Rome," answered the abbé; "but the bird I have in my thoughts wants only opportunity to soar her pitch, like the falcon, Queen of Earth and Air. Seriously, madame—look at the condition of *our* sultan. I speak not of the young king, a weak and rickety boy, with all respect be it said, ill in bed at this very moment, perhaps never to leave his chamber alive. I mean the Regent, my kind patron, your devoted admirer—the true ruler of France. And look at the jewels in his casket. Do you think there is one that he prizes at the value of a worn-out glove?"

The subject possessed a certain degree of interest, trenching though it was upon very delicate ground.

"He has plenty to choose from, at anyrate," observed the marquise; "and I must say I cannot compliment him on the taste he has displayed in these valuables," she added, with a mischievous laugh.

"He would throw them all willingly into the Seine to-morrow," continued Malletort, "might he but possess the gem he covets, and set it in the Crown-royal of France. Yes, madame, the Crown-royal, I repeat it. Where are the obstacles? Louis XV. may not, will not, nay, perhaps, *shall* not live to be a man. Madame d'Orleans inherits the feeble constitution, without the beauty, of her mother, Madame de Montespan. Fagon himself will tell you her life is not worth nine months' purchase, and since she has quarrelled with her daughter she has less interest with the Regent than one of the pages. Her party is no longer in power, the Comte de Toulouse is in disgrace, the Duc du Maine is in disgrace. Illegitimacy is at a discount, though, *parbleu*, it has no want of propagators in our day. To speak frankly, my cousin, a clever woman who could influence the Regent might sway the destinies of the whole nation in six weeks—might be Queen of France in six months from this time."

The marquise listened, as Eve may have listened to the serpent when he pressed her to taste the apple. For different palates, the fruit, tempting, because forbidden, assumes different forms. Sometimes it represents power, sometimes pique, sometimes lucre, and sometimes love. According to their various natures, the tempted nibble at it with their pretty teeth, suck it eagerly with clinging lips, or swallow it whole, like a bolus, at a gulp. The marquise was only nibbling, but her cheek glowed, her eyes shone, and she whispered below her breath, "The Queen of France;" as if there was music in the very syllables.

The abbé paused to let the charm work, ere he resumed, in his half-jesting way—

"The queen, madame! Despite the injustice on our Salic law, you may say *the king!* Such a woman, and I know well of whom I speak, would little by little obtain all the real power of the crown. She might sway the council—she might rule the parliament—she might control the finances. In and out of the palace she would become the dispenser of rank, the fountain of honour. Nay," he added, with a laugh, "she might usurp the last privileges of royalty, and command the very Musketeers of the Guard themselves!"

Did he know that he had touched a string to vibrate through his listener's whole being? She rose and walked to

the window, where the flowers were, while at the same moment he prepared to recall her hastily. It was needless, for she started, turning very pale, and came quietly back to her seat. The abbé's quick ear detected the tramp of a boot crunching the gravel-walk outside, but it was impossible to gather from his countenance whether he suspected the passer-by to be of more importance than one of the gardeners. The marquise, however, had caught a glimpse of a figure she was beginning to know by heart too well. Captain George had of late, indeed ever since Cerise came home, contracted a habit of traversing the gardens of the Hôtel Montmirail to visit a post of his musketeers in the neighbourhood. These guards were permitted to enter everywhere, and Madame de Montmirail was the last person to interfere, in this instance, with their privileges. So little annoyance, indeed, did she seem to experience from the intrusion, that the windows of her boudoir were generally wide open at this hour of the day. Though to visit this post might be a necessary military precaution, it was obviously a duty requiring promptitude less than consideration. Captain George usually walked slowly through the garden, and returned in a very short time at the same deliberate pace. The marquise knew perfectly well that it took him exactly ten minutes by the clock in her boudoir. When she sat down again, Malletort, without noticing her movement or her confusion, proceeded in a sincere and affectionate tone—

"I need not explain more clearly, madame; I need not urge my motives nor dwell upon my own self-sacrifice. It is sufficient for the abbé to see his peerless cousin set out on her journey to fame, and to feel that he has indicated the shortest path. There are obstacles, no doubt; but for what purpose do obstacles exist save to be surmounted or swept away? Let us take them as they come. I can count them all on the fingers of my hand." The abbé began systematically at his thumb. "The young king and Madame d'Orleans are already disposed of, or, at worst, soon will be, in the common course of events. Remain—the *rouées*—Madame de Sabran, and Madame Parabére. Of these, I can manage the first without assistance. I have influence with the whole gang. Some may be persuaded, others intimidated, all can be bribed. I anticipate no opposition worth speaking of from the male element, fond of pleasure, fond of wine, and embarrassed as they are good for nothing. With the last two it is different. Madame de Sabran is witty, handsome, and well-bred; but she spares no person, however exalted, in her sarcasm, and

the Regent fears her tongue while he is oppressed with her society. One or two more of her cutting sayings, and she will sever the cord, already frayed very thin, by which she holds on to fortune. Then she becomes but yesterday's bouquet, and we need trouble ourselves no more with *her!* Exit Madame de Sabran. Enter,—whom shall we name, my beautiful cousin? Whoever it is will have it in her power to become Queen of France. Now there is only Madame de Parabére left; but alas! she is the most dangerous and the most powerful of all. It is against *her* that I must ask you, madame, to lend me your assistance."

"Mine!" repeated the marquise, half surprised and half unwilling, though with no especial liking for the lady in question. "Mine! what can I do?"

"Much," replied Malletort earnestly. "Indeed, everything! Yet, it is very little I will ask you to undertake, though it must eventually lead to the greatest results. Listen. The Regent, while he has confessed to me over and over again that he grows weary of Madame de Parabére, is yet fascinated by her beauty—the beauty, after all, of a baby-face with a skin like cream. Such beauty as even the devil must have possessed when he was young. She has neither wit, nor grace, nor intellect, nor form, nor even features. But she has her *skin*, and that I must admit is wonderfully clear and soft. This attraction possesses some incredible fascination for the duke. If she went out in the sun to-morrow and came home tanned, adieu to her power for ever! I cannot make her go out in the sun, but I think if you will help me I can arrange that she shall become tanned—ay, worse than tanned, speckled all over like a toad. Do you remember once when they praised your beauty at the late king's dinner, she said, 'Yes, you were very well for a mulatto'?"

"I have not forgotten it!" replied the marquise, and her flashing eye showed that neither had she forgiven the offence.

"That little compliment alone would make me her enemy," continued the abbé, "if I allowed myself such luxuries as likes and dislikes; but she is in our way, and that is a far better reason for putting her aside. Now my beautiful cousin has admired those flowers in the window more than once. She thinks they are an offering from her faithful kinsman. It is not so. I have procured them with no small trouble for Madame de Parabére!"

"Then why bring them here?" asked the marquise, with a spice of pardonable pique in her tone.

"Because, if I sent them to her with the compliments of

Monsieur l'Abbé Malletort, the Swiss would probably not take them in; because if I offered them to her myself, I, the cynic, the unimpressionable, the man of marble, who has eyes but for his kinswoman, she would suspect a trick, or perhaps some covert insult or irony that would cause her to refuse the gift point-blank. No, my plan is better laid. You go to the masked ball at the opera to-night. She will be there on the Regent's arm. Jealous, suspicious, domineering, she will never leave him. There is not another petal of stephanotis to be procured for love or money within thirty leagues of Paris; I have assured myself of this. They are her favourite flowers. You will appear at the ball with your bouquet; but for the love of Heaven, my cousin," and the abbé's countenance was really in earnest while he thus adjured her, "do not, even with a mask on, put it within six inches of your face!"

"It is poisoned!" exclaimed the marquise, walking, nevertheless, to the open window where the flowers stood. "Poisoned! I will have nothing to do with it. If we were men, I would force her to cross swords with me on the turf down there. But poison! No, my cousin. I tell you no. Never!"

"Poison is entirely a relative term," observed the abbé philosophically. "All drugs in excess become poisons. These pretty flowers are not poisoned so much as medicated. There is no danger to life in smelling them—none. But their effect on the skin is curious, really interesting from a scientific point of view. A few hours after inspiration, even of one leaf, the complexion loses its freshness, fades, comes out in spots,—turns brown."

The marquise listened attentively.

"Brown! Deep brown! Browner than any mulatto!"

The marquise wavered.

"It really would not be a bad joke, and I think she deserves it for what she said of you."

The marquise consented.

"I will take them to the ball," said she, "and if Madame de Parabére asks for them, why, in common politeness, she must have them. But mask or no mask, I will take care to let her know who I *am!*"

"Better not," said the more cautious abbé, and would have explained why, but the marquise paid no attention to what he said. She seemed uneasy, and moved behind the window-curtain with a nervous gesture and a rising colour in her cheek. "Another complication," muttered her companion, catching once more the measured boot-tramp on the gravel-

walk. "So be it! The more cards dealt, the better chance for the player who can keep at his adversary's hand!"

Looking into the garden, he perceived the musketeer's tall figure moving leisurely along the walk. His pace became slower and slower, and the marquise, behind the curtain, blushed deeper and deeper as he came directly below the window, peering up at the house with an air of caution, not lost on Malletort's observation.

"I will force one of them to play a court card," thought the abbé, and muttering something about "stifling heat," pushed the window noisily, as far open as it would go.

The musketeer looked quickly up, and at the same moment something white and buoyant fluttered lightly to the ground at his very feet. The marquise was trembling and blushing behind her window-curtain. The ruffles at Malletort's wrist had brushed a cluster of blossoms from the stephanotis, and it fell within six inches of Captain George's boot. He picked it up with a murmur of delight. In another moment he would have pressed it to his lips, but the marquise could keep silence no longer. Shrouding herself in the window-curtain, she exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "Hold! monsieur, in Heaven's name! It is poisoned!" He cast a rapid penetrating glance, up, down, all round. His monitress was invisible, and the abbé had shrunk back into the room. Then he examined the blossoms minutely, though at arm's-length, holding them in his gloved hand, and so twirling them carelessly about, as if to avoid observation, went on a few paces ere he threw them on the walk and crushed them to pieces beneath his heel. For two minutes Madame de Montmirail had been hot and cold by turns, giddy, choking—the abbé, the room, the gardens, swimming before her eyes—now she drew a long breath of relief and turned to her cousin.

"By my faith, monsieur l'abbé," said she, "that soldier down there is a true gentleman!"

And Malletort took his leave, reflecting that in research after general information, his last hour's work had been by no means thrown away.

CHAPTER XII

OUT-MANŒUVRED

CAPTAIN GEORGE was not the only soldier of France whom a visit to the Hôtel Montmirail affected that morning with the slighter and premonitory symptoms of fever, such as dry mouth, irregular pulse, and a tendency to flush without physical exertion. While the musketeer was visiting his outposts in anything but a warlike frame of mind, his former general was working his temper up to a state of nervous irritation more trying than usual to the valets and other domestics of his household. The prince-marshal busied himself to-day with preparations for his grand attack, and, contrary to the whole practice of his lifetime, in the event of failure, had made no disposition for retreat. He felt, indeed, a good deal more agitated now than when he led a forlorn-hope of Black Musketeers at twenty, an exploit from which he came off with three flesh-wounds and a broken collar-bone, owing to the usual mistake of too short a scaling-ladder; but he consoled himself by reflecting how this very agitation denoted that the fountain of youth was not yet dried up in his heart.

He rose early, though he could not decently present himself at the Hôtel Montmirail for hours to come. He stormed and swore because his chocolate was not ready, though he hardly tasted it when it was served, and indeed broke his fast on yolk of egg and pounded sugar, mixed up with a small glass of brandy. This stimulating refreshment enabled him to encounter the fatigue of dressing, and very careful the veteran was to marshal his staunch old forces in their most imposing array. The few teeth he could boast were polished up white and glistening. Their ranks indeed had been sadly thinned, but, like the last survivors of a beleaguered garrison, though shattered and disordered, they mustered bravely to the front. His wrinkled cheeks and pointed chin were shaved trim and smooth, while the moustaches on his upper lip, though nearly white, were carefully clipped and arranged in

the prevailing fashion. More than once during the progress of the toilet, before a mirror which he cursed repeatedly for a dull and unbecoming glass, his heart misgave him, and he treated his valets to a few camp compliments current amongst the old die-hards of Turenne; but when at last his cravat was fastened—his frills adjusted, his *just-au-corps* fitted on, his delicate ruffles pulled over his wasted hands, with their swollen knuckles and magnificent rings, his diamond-hilted rapier hung exactly at his hip, and his laced hat cocked jauntily *à la mousquetaire*, he took one approving survey in the mirror, unbecoming as it was, and marched forth confident and resolved to conquer.

His carriage was waiting for him at the porter's lodge of his hôtel. A nobleman of those days seldom walked afoot in the streets, and it took four horses at least, one coachman, one postilion, and two or three footmen in laced coats, to convey a single biped the distance of a couple of hundred metres. As the door of his heraldry-covered coach closed on him with a bang, quoth Auguste, who had dressed him, to Etienne, who had handed the clothes and shared impartially in his master's maledictions—

"Come, that's not so bad, Etienne! Hein? What would you have at sixty-three? And without *me*—bones of St. Martin! what is he? A monkey, a skeleton, a heap of rags and refuse! Ah! What it is! the toilet!—when a man is really master of his work."

The prince-marshal, you see, like other heroes, was none to his *valet de chambre*; but Auguste, a true artist, having neglected none of the *minutiæ* on which success depended, looked to general results, and exulted in the masterpiece that he felt was a creation of his own genius.

Now it fell out that the Prince de Château-Guerrand, hereditary Grand Chasseur to the king, Master of the Horse to the Dauphin, State Exon to the sons and daughters of France, Marshal of its armies, and Chevalier of half a dozen Orders in his own and other countries, with no decoration on earth left to wish for but the Golden Fleece of Spain, which he coveted greedily in consequence, and prized above them all, arrived at the Hôtel Montmirail almost in the moment when Abbé Malletort quitted it at the front entrance, and Captain George of the Grey Musketeers left it by the garden door.

Though the prince's chance of victory must have been doubtful at any time, I do not think he could have chosen a more unfavourable moment to deploy into line, as it were,

and offer battle in the open field. His fair enemy had already been skirmishing with one foe, and caught sight of another, whom she would willingly have engaged. Her trumpets had sounded the *alerte*, her colours were displayed, her artillery was in advance, guns unlimbered, matches lighted, front cleared, all her forces ready and quivering for action—woe to the veteran when he should leave his entrenchments, and sally forth to hazard all his past successes on the rash issue of one stand-up fight! His instincts told him he was wrong, even while he followed the obsequious lackey, in the Montmirail livery, through the glittering suite of rooms that led him to his fate. Followed, with cold hands and shaking knees, he who had led stormers and commanded armies! Even to himself there was a something of ridicule in the position; and he smiled, as a man smiles who is going to the dentist, while he whispered—"Courage, my child! It is but a quarter of an hour, after all! and yet—I wish I had put that other glass of brandy into my *lait de poule!*"

The marquise received him more graciously than usual, and this, too, had he known it, was an omen of ill-success. But it is strange how little experience teaches in the campaigns of Cupid, how completely his guerilla style of warfare foils all regular strategy and established system of tactics. I believe any schoolgirl in her teens to be a match for the most insidious adversary of the opposite sex; and I think that the older the male serpent, and the oftener he has cast his skin, the more easily does his subtlety succumb to the voice of the innocent and unconscious charmer. What chance then had an honest, conceited, thick-headed old soldier, with nothing of the snake about him but his glistening outside, and labouring under the further disadvantage of being furiously in earnest, against such a proficient as the marquise—a coquette of a dozen years' standing, rejoicing in battle, accustomed to triumph, witty, scornful, pitiless, and to-day, for the first time, doubtful of her prowess, and dissatisfied with herself? She had never looked better in her life; the flushed cheeks, the brilliant eyes, the simple white dress, with its scarlet breast-knots, these combined to constitute a very seductive whole, and one that, had there been a mirror in which she could see it reflected, might have gone far to strengthen the abbé's arguments, and to convince her that his schemes, aspiring though they seemed, were founded on a knowledge of human nature, experience, and common-sense. Neither, I imagine, does a woman ever believe in her heart that any destiny can be quite beyond her reach. Though

Kissed her hand
with a portentous compliment

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e prince-marshal was too good a soldier to neglect
ortunity for retreat, and retired in good order,
himself that though he had suffered severely, it
ll be considered a drawn battle with the marquise.

In spite of herself she was a little cowed.

"One moment, prince!" she exclaimed, rising to shut the door and window of her boudoir, as if against listeners. It was a simple feminine manœuvre to gain time; but, looking into the garden, she spied a remnant of the stephanotis left where George had trodden it, and when she sat down again she was as brave as a lioness once more. Her change of position rather disordered her suitor's line of battle, and as she had skilfully increased the distance between them, his tactics were still further impeded. In his love affairs the prince-marshal's system had always been to come as soon as possible to close quarters; but it was so long since he had made a regular formal proposal of marriage, that he could not for the life of him remember the precise attitude in which he had advanced. Some vague recollection he entertained, strengthened by what he had seen on the stage, of going down on his knees, but the floor was very slippery, and he was not quite confident about getting up again. It would be ridiculous, he felt, to urge his suit on all-fours, and he knew the marquise well enough, besides, to be quite sure her paroxysms of laughter in such a difficulty would render her incapable of returning an intelligible answer. Altogether, he decided on sitting still, and though it was obviously a disadvantage, doing his love-making at arm's-length.

"Madame!" he repeated for the fourth time, "I am a soldier; I am a man of few words; I am, I hope, a gentleman, but I am no longer young. I do not dissemble this; I am even past my prime. Frankly, madame, I am getting an old man."

It was incontestable. She smothered a smile as she mentally conceded the position, but in reply she had nothing to say, and she said it. The prince-marshal, expecting the disclaimer that perhaps politeness demanded, seemed here a little bothered. He had no doubt gone through many rehearsals of the imaginary scene, and it confused him to lose his anticipated cue. Seeking inspiration once more, then, from his hat, he proceeded rather inconsequently.

"Therefore it is that I feel emboldened in the present instance to lay before you, madame, the thoughts, the intentions, the wishes, in brief—the anticipations that I had formed of my own future, and to ask your opinion, and, indeed, your advice, or perhaps, I should say, your approval of my plans."

What a quick ear she had! Far off, upstairs, she heard the door of her daughter's bedroom shut, and she knew that Cerise, after stopping at every flower-stand in the gallery,

would as usual come straight to her mamma's boudoir. Such a diversion would be invaluable, as it must for the present prevent any decided result from her interview with the prince-marshal. She had resolved not to accept him for a husband, we know, and sooner or later, she must come to a definite understanding with her faithful old suitor; but she seemed in this instance strangely given to procrastination, and inclined from time to time to put off the evil day. Why she did not prefer to have done with it once for all, why she could not wait calmly for his proposal and refuse him with a polite reverence, as she had refused a score of others, it is not for me to explain. Perhaps she would not willingly abdicate a sovereignty that became year by year more precious and more precarious. Perhaps she loved a captive, as a cat loves a mouse, allowing it so much liberty as shall keep it just within reach of the cruel velvet paw. Perhaps she shrank from any decided step that would force her own heart to confess it was interested elsewhere. A woman's motives may be countless as the waves on the shore, her intention fathomless as mid-ocean by the deep-sea lead.

Hearing the march of her auxiliaries, she made light of an engagement at closer quarters now. Looking affectionately in the prince-marshal's face, she drew her chair a little nearer, and observed in a low voice—

"I am pretty sure to approve of any plan, my prince, that conduces to your comfort—to your welfare, nay"—for she heard the rustle of her daughter's dress, and the lock of the door move—"to your happiness!"

The tone and accompanying glance were irresistible. Any male creature must have fallen a victim on the spot. The prince-marshal, sitting opposite the door, dropped his hat, sprang from his chair a yard at a bound, made a pounce at the white hand of the marquise, and before he could grasp it, stopped midway as if turned to stone, his mouth open, his frame rigid, his very moustaches stiffening, and his eyes staring blankly at the figure of Cerise in the doorway, who, although a good deal discomposed, for she thought to find mamma alone, rose—or rather *sank*—to the occasion, and bestowed on him the lowest, the most voluminous, and the longest reverence that was ever practised for months together at their pension by the best brought-up young ladies in France. The prince-marshal was too good a soldier to neglect such an opportunity for retreat, and retired in good order, flattering himself that though he had suffered severely, it might still be considered a drawn battle with the marquise.

When he had made his bow with a profusion of compliments to the fresh and beautiful mademoiselle, whom he wished at a worse place than back in her convent, mother and daughter sat down to spend the morning together. Contrary to custom, the pair were silent and preoccupied ; each, while she tried to seem at ease, immersed in her own thoughts, and yet, though engrossed with the same subject or meditation, it was strange that neither of them mentioned it to the other.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MOTHER OF SATAN

MALLETORT, leaving his cousin's house by its principal egress, did not enter his coach at once, but whispering certain directions to the servants, proceeded leisurely down a narrow lane or alley, leading, after a variety of windings, into one of the great thoroughfares of Paris. The street was well adapted for such an interview, either of love or business, as it was desirable to keep secret, consisting, on one side, only of the backs of the houses, in which the windows were built up, and on the other, of the high dead wall that bounded the extensive premises of the Hôtel Montmirail. Casting a hasty glance before and behind, to make sure he was not watched, the abbé, when he reached the narrowest part of the narrow passage—for it was hardly more—halted, smiled, and observed to himself: "A man's character must be either very spotless or very good for nothing if he can thus afford to set the decencies of life at defiance. A churchman with an assignation! and at noon in this quarter of Paris! My friend, it is rather a strong measure, no doubt! And suppose, nevertheless, she should fail to appear? It would be the worse for her, that's all! Ah! the sweet sultana! There she is!"

While he spoke, a woman, wrapped in a large shawl, with another folded round her head, came swiftly down the alley, and stopped within two paces of him. It was the quadroon, agitated, hurried, a good deal out of breath, and, perhaps, also a little out of temper.

"It's no use, monsieur l'abbé!" were the first words she gasped. "I cannot, and I dare not, and I *will* not. Besides, I have no time, I must be back directly. There's made-

moiselle, most likely, wanting me this minute. The idea of such a thing! It's out of the question altogether!"

Malletort laughed good-humouredly. He could afford to be good-humoured, for the woman was in his power.

"And the alternative?" said he. "Not that I want to *drive* you, my queen of Sheba, but still, a bargain is a bargain. Do you think mademoiselle would engross your time much longer if the marquise knew all I know, and, indeed, all that it is my duty to tell her?"

Célandine clasped her hands imploringly, and dropped at once into complete submission.

"I will go with you, monsieur l'abbé," said she humbly. "But you will not forget your promise. If you were to betray me I should die."

"And I, too," thought Malletort, who knew the nature with which he had to deal, and treated it as a keeper treats the tigress in her cage. "It is no question of betrayal," he said aloud. "Follow me. When we reach the carriage, step in. My people know where to drive."

He walked on very fast, and she followed him; her black eyes glancing fierce misgivings, like those of a wild animal that suspects a snare. Two or three more windings, with which he seemed thoroughly familiar, a glance around that showed not a passenger visible, nor indeed a living soul, save a poor old rag-picker raking a heap of refuse with her hook, and the quadroon suddenly emerged in mid-stream, so to speak, surrounded by the life and bustle of one of the main streets in Paris. At a few paces distant stood a plain, well-appointed coach, and the abbé, pointing to its door, which a servant was holding open, Célandine found herself, ere she could look round, rumbling, she knew not where, over the noisy pavement, completely in that man's power, for whom, perhaps, of all men in the world, she entertained the strongest feelings of terror, stronger even than her aversion.

She did not take long, however, to recover herself. The strain of savage blood to which she owed those fierce black eyes and jetty locks gave her also, with considerable physical courage, the insensibility of rude natures to what we may term moral fear. She might shudder at a drawn knife if she were herself unarmed, or cower before a whip if her hands were tied and her back bared; but to future evil, to danger, neither visible nor tangible, she was callous as a child. They had not travelled half a mile ere she showed her delight in every feature of her expressive face at the rapid motion and the gay scenes through which she was driven. In a few

minutes she smiled pleasantly, and asked their destination as gaily as if they had been going to a ball. Malletort thought it a good opportunity for a few impressive words.

"Célandine," said he gravely, "every one of us has a treasure somewhere hidden up in the heart. What is it that you love better than everything else in the world?"

The dark face, tanned by many a year of sun, yet comely still, saddened and softened while he spoke, the black eyes grew deeper and deeper as they seemed to look dreamily into the past. After a pause she drew a sorrowful sigh, and answered, "Mademoiselle!"

"Good," replied the abbé. "You are bound on an errand now for which mademoiselle will be grateful to you till her dying day."

She looked curiously in his face.

"Cerise is dear to me as my own," said she. "How can I do more for her to-day than yesterday, and to-morrow, and every day of my life?"

He answered by another question.

"Would you like to see your darling a Princess of France?"

The quadroon's eyes glistened and filled with tears.

"I would lay down my life for the child," was all she said in reply.

But he had got her malleable now, and he knew it. Those tear-drops showed him she was at the exact temperature for fusion. A little less, she would have remained too cold and hard. A little more, and over-excitement would have produced irritation, anger, defiance; then the whole process must have been begun again. It was a good time to secure her confederacy, and let her see a vague shadowy outline of his plans. In a few short sentences, but glowing and eloquent, because of the tropical nature to which they were addressed, Malletort sketched out the noble destiny he had in view for her mistress, and the consequent elevation of Cerise to the rank of royalty. He impressed on his listener the necessity of implicit, unquestioning obedience to his commands. Above all, of unbroken silence and unvaried caution till their point was gained.

"As in your own beautiful island," said the abbé, soaring for the occasion to the metaphorical; "if you would pass by night through its luxuriant jungles, you must keep the star that guides you steadily in view, nor lose sight of it for an instant; so in the path I shall indicate, never forget, however distant and impracticable it may seem, the object to which our efforts are directed. In either case, if your attention

wanders for a moment, in that moment your feet stray from the path; you stumble amongst the tangled creepers—you pierce yourself with the cruel cactus—you tread on some venomous reptile that turns and stings you to the bone; nay, you may topple headlong down a precipice into the deep, dark, silent waters of the lagoon. Once there, I tell you fairly, you might wait for a long while before the marquise, or mademoiselle, or myself would wet a finger to pull you out!"

Thus urging on his listener the importance of her task, now in plain direct terms, now in the figurative language of parables, their drive seemed to have lasted but a few minutes, when it was brought to an abrupt termination by the stoppage of the coach before Signor Bartoletti's residence. It appeared that the visitors were expected, for a couple of his heavily decorated footmen waited on the stairs, and Célandine, following the abbé with wondering eyes and faltering steps, found herself received with as much pomp and ceremony as if she had been a Princess of the Blood. They were ushered into the room that communicated with his laboratory. It was empty, but wine and fruit stood on the table. Malletort pressed the quadroon to taste the former in vain. Then he passed without ceremony into the adjoining apartment, assuring her of his speedy return.

Left to herself, Célandine drank greedily from the water-jug ere she crossed the floor on tiptoe, stealthy as a wild cat, and pressing her ear to the door, applied all her faculties intently to the one act of listening. She heard the abbé's greeting distinctly enough, and the sentence immediately following, spoken laughingly, as usual.

"The parts are cast," said he, "and the stage prepared. It remains but to dress the principal actress and make her perfect in her cue."

"Have you brought her?" answered an eager voice, hurried, agitated, and scarcely above a whisper.

Indistinct as were the syllables, their effect on the quadroon was like magic. She started, she passed her hand wildly across her face; her very lips turned white, and she trembled in every limb. Her attitude was no longer the simple act of listening. In concentrated eagerness, it resembled the crouch of a leopard before its spring. The door opened, and she sprang in good earnest. As Bartoletti crossed the threshold she flew at him, and with one pounce had him fast by the throat.

"Where is he?" she screamed, with foaming lips and flashing eyes. "Where is he? What have you done with

him? I will kill you if you do not tell me. Man! Beast! Monster! Where have you hid my child?"

It took all the abbé's strength, combined with the Italian's own efforts, to untwine those nervous fingers. At last he shook himself free, to stand gasping, panting, wiping his face, exhausted, terror-stricken, and unmanned. When her physical powers yielded, the woman's nervous system gave way as well. Sinking into a chair, she sobbed and wept hysterically, rocking herself to and fro, murmuring—

"My baby! My fair-faced baby! My own! My only child!"

Bartoletti had by this time found his voice, though still husky and unstrung.

"Célandine!" he exclaimed, and the tone denoted fear, anxiety, surprise, even disgust, yet a something of tenderness and interest ran through it all.

Malletort lifted his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, and had recourse to his snuff-box. A few words had settled his business with the adept, and his fine perceptions told him that in a scene like the present, however it originated, the interference of a third person would do more harm than good. Had he permitted himself such weaknesses, he felt he could have been astonished; but the abbé had long established as an axiom, that "he might be disgusted, but could never be surprised." He had skill to distinguish, moreover, the nice point at which a delicate piece of workmanship may be quite spoiled by one additional touch, and knew the exact moment when it is advisable to leave both well and ill alone; so he pocketed his snuff-box, and made a bow to the agitated pair.

"An unexpected recognition," said he politely, "and agitating, I perceive, to both. My introduction is then unnecessary. Pardon! You will permit me to wish you good-day, and leave you to arrange matters between yourselves!"

Insensibly Bartoletti opened the door for his guest. Insensibly he returned the parting salutation, and insensibly, like a sleep-walker, he sat down opposite and gazed blankly in the quadroon's face. She at least was awake, and on the alert. The storm of her emotion had subsided. She summoned all her energies for the object she had in view.

"Stefano!" she said, in a kindly, conciliating tone, "forgive my violence. You and I have been friends for years. You know my quick temper of old. I can trust you. You can never be indifferent to my welfare."

He was sufficiently reassured by this time to fill a large

goblet of wine, which he half emptied at a gulp. His cheek regained its swarthy bloom, and his little black eye glistened fondly, while he answered—

"Never indifferent, Célandine! Never false! Never changed in all these years!"

She was, as we know, one-fourth a negress, and past middle age—of an exterior so wild and weird, that the courtiers called her, as we also know, the Mother of Satan. He was turned fifty, self-indulgent, dishonest, with oily skin and beady eyes; short, swarthy, thick-set, and altogether not unlike a mole! Yet was there a spark of true love for his visitor lurking somewhere not entirely smothered amongst all the mass of impurities with which the man's heart was filled. She was too much a woman to be quite unconscious of her power. She spoke in soft and coaxing accents now, while she replied—

"I know it, Stefano. I believe it. I have also a good memory, and am not likely to forget. And, Stefano, you have a kind heart—you will not keep me longer in suspense about the child. He is here? In this house? In the next room? Oh! let me see him! Let me only see him, and I will do anything you ask!"

She had slid from her chair, and knelt before him, holding the adept's scarred, burned fingers to her lips. His face betrayed the pain he suffered in inflicting pain on her.

"What can I tell you?" he answered. "It is cruel to deceive you. It is cruel to speak the truth. I have never seen the boy since he left me. Do you think I would have kept him from you? How can I find him? How can I bring him back? You talk as if I was King of France!"

A horrible fear came across her. She rose to her feet, and shook both fists in his face.

"Man!" she exclaimed, "do not tell me he is dead! You shall answer for it, if heaven or hell have any power on earth!"

There were tears in his little beady eyes, unaccustomed tears, that vouched for his truth, even to *her*, while he replied—

"You are unjust, Célandine; and you would see your injustice if you did but think for a moment. What had I to gain by taking care of the boy? What had I to gain by ridding myself of him? Had I been to blame, do you suppose I should have sent you the earliest information of his flight? Have I not felt your sorrows keenly as if they were my own? Do I not feel for you now? Listen. I am the same Stefano Bartoletti who told you the secret of his

life, the desire of his heart, by the side of that sweet serene lagoon, in the beautiful island which probably neither of us may ever see again. I have learned many strange lessons—I have witnessed many strange scenes since then. Many years have passed over my head, and wisdom has not despised me as the least apt among her pupils. Statesmen, nobles, princes themselves have been glad to visit me in person, and reap the fruit of my studies and my experience. But I tell you, Célandine," and here the little man smote his breast, and for the moment looked every inch a champion, "I am the same Stefano Bartoletti. I swear to you that if you will but join me heart and hand in this, the last and greatest of my schemes, I will never rest till I have found the boy, and brought him back into his mother's arms!"

She gave a wild, fierce cry of joy, and was hugging the brown hand to her bosom once more.

"Money," observed the signor, walking thoughtfully up and down the room as soon as she had sufficiently composed herself to listen, "money, you perceive, is the one thing we require. Money alone can overcome this, like all other difficulties on earth. Money in sufficient quantity would make me independent, contented, perhaps happy." Here he stole a tender look in the quadroon's face. "Money would enable me to quit these cold, dull regions; this constrained, confined, unnatural life. Money would restore me my liberty, and you your child. Célandine, will you help me to get it?"

He had touched the right chord. There was eager hope and wild unscrupulous energy in her face while she answered—

"I will! I swear it! Heart and hand I go in with you for this object, and neither fire nor water, nor steel nor poison shall turn me now. You know me, Stefano. I will shrink from nothing. But it is—it is not a question of blood?"

"No, no!" he replied, laughing. "You, too, are unchanged, Célandine. Always in extremes. Make yourself easy on that score. It is but a trick of your former trade. None but yourself can do it half so well. I will explain it all in five minutes when I have finished this cup of wine. But, Célandine," and here her old admirer drew closer and whispered in her ear.

"I cannot tell," she laughed. "It is impossible to give an answer yet."

"And the price?" continued he earnestly. "Surely it must have fallen now, though the marquise is hard to deal with on such matters."

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The quadroon shook her head archly, indeed, coquettishly for her years, and replied—

"Certainly not less than a couple of thousand francs."

"But suppose she knew everything?" urged the lover.

"Then I think she would be so angry, she would have me flogged and give me away for nothing!"

He shook his head, pondering deeply. The flogging was indeed a serious consideration. But then, what a reduction it would make in the price!

There was grave matter, he thought, for reflection in the whole business, and his manner was more sedate than usual, while he instructed Célandine in a certain part that the abbé and he had agreed she should perform.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DÉBONNAIRE

"IT is good to be superior to mortal weakness," said Malletort to himself as he re-entered his coach and drove from Bartoletti's door. "In the human subject I cannot but observe how few emotions are conducive to happiness. That which touches the heart seems always prejudicial to the stomach. How ridiculous, how derogatory, and how uncomfortable to turn red and pale, to burst into tears, to spring at people's throats, nay, even to feel the pulse beat, the head swim, the voice fail at a word, a look, a presence! What, then, constitutes the true well-being of man, the *summum bonum*, the vantage point, the grand *desideratum* to which all philosophy is directed? Self-command! But self-command leads to the command of others,—to success, to victory, to power! and power with none to share it, none to benefit by it, is it worth the labour of attainment? Can it be that its eminence is but like the crest of a mountain, from which the more extended the horizon the flatter and the more monotonous appears the view? It may, but what matter? Let me only get to the summit, and I can always come down again at my leisure. *Basta!* here we are. Now to gain a foothold on the slippery path that leads to the very top!"

The abbé's carriage was brought to a halt while he spoke by a post of Grey Musketeers stationed in front of the Palais-Royal. The churchman's plain and quiet equipage had no right of entrance, and he alighted to pass through the narrow ingress left unguarded for foot-passengers. Hence he crossed a paved court, turned short into a wing of the building with which he seemed well acquainted, and stopped at the foot of a narrow staircase, guarded by one solitary sentry of the corps. It was our acquaintance, Bras-de-Fer, beguiling the tedium of his watch by a mental review of his own adventures in love and war. The abbé knew everybody, and the grim musketeer saluted his holy friend cordially enough, excusing himself,

while he balanced his heavy weapon across his breast, that his orders forbade him to allow anyone to pass.

"Lay down your arms, my son," said the churchman good-humouredly. "How your wrists must ache by supper-time! I have but three words to say to your captain, and if you will bend your tall head lower by a few inches I can give you the countersign."

With that he whispered it in his ear, and Bras-de-Fer, again excusing himself, bade him pass on, regaining an attitude of extreme stiffness and martial severity, as if to make amends for past civility somewhat at variance with established discipline.

A green-baize door at the head of the staircase swung open to the abbé's push, admitting him to an ante-room, of which Captain George was the only occupant. He, too, seemed weary of his watch, which was tedious from its dull unvarying routine—void of excitement, yet entailing grave and oppressive responsibilities. His greeting to Malletort, however, was more cordial, so thought that keen observer, than is afforded by a man who merely wearies of his own society; and the abbé was right in his general impression, only wrong in detail. Captain George was indeed favourably affected to everybody connected, however distantly, with the house of Montmirail. So far the abbé judged correctly enough, but he missed the true cause by a hair's-breadth, and attributed to the magic of black eyes an effect exclusively owing to blue. There was little leisure, however, for exchange of compliments, and the musketeer's solitude was to be relieved but for a few precious moments at a time.

"His Highness has already twice asked for you," said he, in the tone of an injured man. "You had better go in at once."

So Malletort, leaving the ill-used warrior to his own companionship, passed on to an inner apartment, taking with him a stool in his hand, as was the custom, in case the interview should be protracted, and the Regent require him to sit down. The room he entered was small, gloomy, panelled with a dark-coloured wood, octagonal in shape, relieved by very little furniture, and having another door, opposite that which admitted the visitor, concealed by heavy velvet curtains. At the solitary table, and on the single chair the apartment contained, a man was seated, writing busily, with his back to the abbé. A general air of litter pervaded the place, and although the table was heaped with papers, several more were scattered in disorder over the floor.

The writer continued his occupation for several minutes, as if unconscious of the abbé's presence. Suddenly he gave a sigh of relief, pushed his chair back from the table, and looked up joyously, like a schoolboy interrupted in his task.

"You are welcome, monsieur, you are welcome," said he, rising and pacing to and fro with short, quick steps, while Malletort performed a series of courtly and elaborate bows. "I am about wearied of figures, and I have been saying to myself, with every passing step for the last half-hour, 'Ah! here comes my little abbé, who confines himself exclusively to facts—my material and deep-thinking churchman, the best judge in Christendom of wine, pictures, carriages, cutlets, ankles, eyelashes, probabilities, dress, devilry, and deeds of darkness. Here are calculations of Las, to show us all how we need only be able to write our names, and so acquire boundless wealth; but the miserable Scot knows no more than the dead how to spend his millions. Would you believe it, my dear fellow, Vaudeville dined with him last night, and they served olives with the stewed ortolans? Olives, I tell you, with ortolans! The man must be a hog!"

And the Regent wrinkled up his forehead while he spoke in a favourite grimace, that he flattered himself resembled the portraits of Henri Quatre. He bore, indeed, a kind of spurious resemblance to that great king and gallant soldier, but the resemblance of the brach to the deer-hound, the palfrey to the war-horse, the hawk to the eagle. He made the most of it, however, such as it was; brushed his dark hair into a cluster on the top of his head, contracted the point of his nose, elongated his chin, and elevated his eyebrows, till he almost fancied himself the first Bourbon who sat on the throne of France. Nay, he even went so far as to wear his stockings and the knees of his breeches extremely tight, while the latter were gathered and puckered loosely about the waist, to approach as nearly as possible the costume in which the hero was usually portrayed. In all the worst points of his paragon's character he copied him to the life, only exaggerating to habitual vice the love of pleasure that was Henry's principal weakness. As the duke's face was broad, high-coloured, good-humoured, nay, notwithstanding the marks it bore of his excesses, tolerably well-favoured, while his figure, though scarcely tall enough for dignity, was robust and in fair proportion, the imitation seemed, perhaps, not entirely unfaithful to its original. Both possessed in a high degree the charm of an exquisite manner; but while the King of Navarre combined with a monarch's condescension the frank and simple bearing

of a soldier, the Duke of Orleans was especially distinguished for the suavity and external ease that mark the address of an accomplished gentleman. This prince possessed, no doubt, the germ of many good qualities, but how could the most promising seed bear fruit when it was choked up and overgrown by such rank weeds as gluttony, drunkenness, and sensuality? vices which seem to sap the energy of the mind as surely, if not so rapidly, as they destroy the vigour of the body.

Yet the Regent was gifted with a certain persuasive eloquence, a certain facility of speech and gesture, invaluable to those who have the conduct of public affairs. He possessed a faithful memory, ready wit, imperturbable good-humour, and quickness of perception in seizing the salient points of a subject, which made him appear, at least, a capable politician, if not a deep and far-seeing statesman. Neither was he wanting in that firmness which was so much required by the state of parties at the time when he assumed the Regency, and this was the more remarkable, that his nervous system could not but have been much deteriorated and deranged by the frequency and extravagance of his debauches. Meantime, we have left the abbé bowing and the duke grimacing at the bare idea of brown game and olives in the same stewpan, a subject that occupied his attention for several minutes. Rousing himself after a while, he began, as usual, to detail the proceedings of the morning's council to Malletort, who had grown by degrees, from a mere comrade of his pleasures, into the confidential and principal adviser of his schemes. It promised to be a long report, and he motioned the abbé, who had fortunately prepared himself with a stool, to sit down. There were many complaints to make—many knots to unfasten—many interests to reconcile, but the abbé listened patiently, and suggested remedies for each in turn.

The parliament had been refractory. Nothing could bring them to subjection but a Bed of Justice, or full assemblage of peers and representatives in presence of the young king. The Keeper of the Seals was unreasonable. He must be forced into collision with the parliament, whom he had always held in antagonism, and they might be left to punish each other. The Duc du Maine and Marshal de Villeroy, constant thorns in the Regent's side, had applied for more powers, more pomp, and, worse still, more money, on the score of the young king. His Majesty must be set against his governors, and it could best be done by making a festival for him to which these would not trust his person, and from which an enforced

restriction would cause the royal pupil to feel himself shamefully aggrieved. In short, conflicting interests were to be reconciled, if their disunion seemed to threaten the Government; political parties to be dissolved by a judicious apple of discord thrown in their midst at the abbé's instigation; and a general balance of power to be established, in which the Regent could always preponderate by lending his own weight to the scale. Altogether a dozen difficulties of statecraft were disposed of in as many minutes, and the duke, rising from the table, pressed his hand familiarly on the confidant's shoulder, to keep him in his seat, and exclaimed gaily.

"They may well call me the 'Débonnaire,' little abbé. Hein! There have been but two Bourbons yet who ever understood France. One was a king, and the other—well, the other is only a regent. No matter. Cric! Crac! Two snaps of the fingers, and everything fits into its place like a game at dominoes. But, little abbé," added the exulting politician, while his brow clouded and he forgot to look like Henri Quatre, "to govern the nation signifies but ruling *men*. Such matters arrange themselves. The State machine can go without a push. But I have worse complications than these. Counsel me, my dear abbé. There is discord dire this morning throughout the women. I tell you the whole heap are at daggers drawn with one another, and my life is hardly safe amongst them all."

Malletort smiled and shook his head. The difficulty was natural enough, but the remedy required consideration. So he opened his snuff-box.

"There is a tribe of Arabs," he replied, "Highness, far up in the desert, of whom I have heard that their religion permits each man to marry two wives, but with the stipulation, at first sight reasonable enough, that he should live with them both in one tent. The practice of bigamy, I understand, has in that tribe so fallen into disuse as to be completely unknown."

The Regent laughed loudly.

"I believe it," said he, "I believe it implicitly. Powers of strife! and parts of speech! A man should be blind and deaf also to endure the Parabére and the Sabran in neighbouring *faubourgs*, not to speak of the same tent! Ah! these Orientals understand domestic government thoroughly. The harem is a place for repose, and a noisy woman soon quits it, I believe, by the river gate. We too have the Seine, but alas! where is the sack? I tell you, Malletort, I am tired of them both. I am tired of them all. Madame la duchesse

may be cold, pompous, stiff, contradictory, and, oh! as wearisome as a funeral! but at least she remains half the day in her own apartments, and can command herself sufficiently to behave with decency when she leaves them."

"Madame la duchesse," replied the abbé, bowing reverentially, "is an exemplary and adorable princess. She has but one fault, perhaps I should say less her fault than her misfortune—she is your Highness's wife."

The Débonnaire laughed again, loud and long.

"Well said, little abbé!" he exclaimed. "My fault—her misfortune. Nevertheless the crime is unpardonable—so no more of *her*. How shall I reconcile Madame de Sabran and Madame de Parabére? I tell you, they sup with us this very night. You make one, abbé, of course!" Malletort bowed lower than ever. "But think of these two at enmity across my narrow table! Why the Centaurs and Lapithæ would be a love-feast compared to it. Like my ancestor of Navarre, monsieur l'abbé, I fear neither man nor devil, but there are some women, I honestly confess, whose anger I dare not encounter, and that is the truth!"

"I know nothing of women and their ways," answered Malletort humbly. "It is a science my profession and my inclinations forbid me alike to understand, but I imagine that in gallantry as in chemistry, counteracting influences are most effectual when of a cognate nature to the evil. *Similia similibus curantur;* and your Highness can have no difficulty, surely, in applying a thousand smiling soft-spoken antidotes to two scolding, scowling women."

The Regent shook his head gravely. It was a subject of which he had diligently studied both theory and practice, yet found he knew little more about it than when he began.

"They are all so different," he complained peevishly, "and yet all so alike in their utter insensibility to reason, their perverted wilfulness in looking on impossibilities as accomplished facts. There is Madame de Sabran wants me to make her a duchess of France! 'How can I make you a duchess of France, madame?' said I. 'Would you have your "mastiff," as you call him, created a duke for *your* services?' 'He would make a better than So-and-so, and So-and-so,' she answered, as coolly as possible, naming half a dozen, who it must be confessed are not one bit more respectable! That is another thing about the woman, she always contrives to have a distorted shadow of reason, like a stick in the water, on her side. It was only the other day I made him one of my chamberlains, and now she declares he ought to be given a

step of rank to uphold the dignity of the office. How can you reason with such a woman as that?"

"Waste of time, Highness!" answered Malletort composedly. "They are born not to be instructed, but admired!"

"I used to admire her more than I do now," observed the Regent thoughtfully. "Still the woman is amusing and witty; there is no denying it. Besides, she speaks her mind freely, and however violent the passions she puts herself in, they are over in five minutes. But what am I to do with the other? I give you the honour of a Bourbon, my friend, she has not uttered a syllable beyond 'Yes, monsieur,' 'No, monsieur,' since yesterday afternoon, when she dropped at once from the height of good-humour into a fit of impenetrable sulks."

"Without the slightest cause, of course!" observed the abbé.

"Without the slightest cause," repeated the prince, "at least that I could discover. There was indeed a slight difficulty about some flowers. I had promised her a bouquet of stephanotis for the masked ball to-night. It is rare—its smell is to me overpowering, but it is her favourite perfume. Well, my people scoured the country for half a dozen leagues round Paris, and none was to be procured. With you or me, abbé, the conclusion would seem natural enough, that if the stephanotis has not yet bloomed, the stephanotis cannot yet be in flower. But to a woman—bah—such an argument is no reason at all! It is quite possible she may even refuse to accompany me to the ball to-night!"

Malletort did not think so, and his hopes, just now so buoyant, lost nothing by a suggestion which only betrayed his patron's ignorance of the female mind.

"Ah, Highness," he exclaimed, throwing a gleam of sympathy into his eyes, which contrasted much with their usual expression, "how completely is your condescension misjudged! How utterly your kind heart thrown away! You say truly, women are so different. These think of their own aggrandisement even while they bask in your affection. Others here at Court would throw themselves body and soul at your feet were you to-morrow changed into a simple page from Duke of Orleans and Master of France!"

"How?" exclaimed the Regent, unable to conceal that his vanity was gratified. "Do you speak from your own knowledge? Are you laughing at me? How can you possibly have found this out?"

"It is indeed a matter quite beyond my province," answered

the abbé; "but circumstances have thrown me so frequently into the society of one of the ladies in question, that I must indeed have been blind not to perceive the truth. Excuse me, Highness, I had rather not pursue the subject any farther."

But the Regent was not so to be put off. With all his shrewdness, he had considerable personal vanity, and but for his debaucheries, might perhaps have shown some sensibility of heart. In his mind he ran over the leading beauties of the Court, and as he had been little scrupulous in paying them attention, one and all, the riddle was perhaps the less difficult to solve. His eye sparkled, and he clapped his hands like a schoolboy, while he shouted out—

"I have it! I have it! Little abbé, you have let the cat out of the bag. Now I know why the proudest names in France have been offered her in vain. Now I understand her defiance, her coldness, her unapproachable dignity. Do you know, my friend, what you tell me is a veritable romance, and, in return, I assure you I have never been insensible to the charms of Madame de Montmirail!"

"You are speaking of my kinswoman, monsieur le duc," replied the abbé haughtily; "and a member of the proudest house in the kingdom. Your Highness will be good enough to reflect that I mentioned no names, and I have been too faithful a servant, I think, to deserve a gratuitous insult."

"Pardon, my dear abbé!" exclaimed the Regent, with an affectation of deep concern, though accepting Malletort's protest, no doubt, at its real value. "None can respect the house of Montmirail more than I do. None can value the friendship of Abbé Malletort so much; but these women and their whims turn my poor head. What did you advise about the Parabére? I forget."

"Dismiss her!" answered the churchman shortly. "It will be one embarrassment the less in your Highness's career."

"But she is so beautiful," whimpered the Regent. "There is not such another complexion in France. If I were to leave her, do you not think half my nobility would be mad to pay their court to her? She is so white, you see—so exceedingly white and soft. Such a skin, my dear abbé. Such a skin!"

"Skin her, then!" replied Malletort, "and make a covering of her integument for your arm-chair. It is the best advice I can offer your Highness, and what I should do myself in your case."

Then they both laughed at the brutal jest. The one because he was in high good-humour with the prospect of his

hinted conquest; the other because he had not forgotten the bouquet, of which a few inhalations could turn the whole face black; and because, reflecting on the rapid progress of his schemes, he thought it only fair that those should laugh who win. But in order thoroughly to act his part out, he returned to business before he took his leave. "Those *lettres de cachet*!" he exclaimed, as if he had just recollected them. "Did your Highness express your views on the subject to your council?"

"I did indeed," answered the Regent significantly; "and the good old custom is revived by an edict. But though he who seeks finds, I think he is more sure to find who *hides*, and I will take care no man in France shall use them but myself."

Then Malletort bowed himself out, well satisfied, and found Captain George in the ante-room, putting on his belts to receive the Black Musketeers, whose band could be heard playing and their arms clashing as they marched into the court to relieve guard.

window when he passed, which was indeed his own fault, since, in his impatience, he had crossed the gardens of the Hôtel Montmirail a quarter of an hour before his usual time, and had thus perhaps inflicted as much disappointment as he sustained.

Now people in the irritable frame of mind caused by a little anxiety, a little disappointment, and a good deal of uncertainty, seldom betake themselves to solitude, which is indeed rather the resort of real happiness or the refuge of utter despair. The simply discontented are more prone to rush into a crowd, and Captain George had no idea of abstaining from the Great Masked Ball at the Opera House, but rather made his appearance somewhat earlier than his wont at this festivity, though when there, he roamed about in a desultory and dissatisfied manner, first dreading, then faintly hoping, and lastly ardently desiring to meet Mademoiselle de Montmirail amongst that brilliant, shifting, bantering, and mysterious throng. Disguised, indeed! He would know her, he felt sure, by her pretty feet alone, if she were masked down to her very ankles. He was not so well versed in feminine arts but that he had yet to learn how a lady who really wished to remain unknown at these gatherings would alter her voice, her gestures, her figure, her gait — nay, the very shape of her hands and feet, to deceive those on whom she wished to practise. The majority, on the contrary, were most unwilling thus to sink their identity, and only wore masks, I imagine, to hide the absence of blushes at such direct compliments as were sure to be addressed to them, also as an excuse for considerable freedom of speech in return.

The orchestra was pealing out a magnificent "Minuet de la Cour," and that stately measure, performed by a few couples of the handsomest gallants and ladies of the Court, was eliciting the applause of a large and critical circle, amongst whom Captain George made one, when a voice thrilled in his ear, the tone of which brought the blood to his cheek, while a masked figure beside him passed her hand lightly through his arm. A tremendous flourish of brass instruments rendered the moment well-chosen for secret communication; but the mask had apparently nothing more confidential to say than this—

"*Qui cherche trouve!* You seek something, fair musketeer. If you are in earnest, you shall find what you require!"

The voice reminded him almost painfully of Cerise, yet was it deeper and fuller than the girl's in tone. He scanned

the figure at his side with a quick penetrating glance; but she was so shrouded in a black satin cloak reaching to the flounces of her ball-dress, that he gathered but little from her inspection. He noted, however, a leaf of the stephanotis, peeping from under the folds that concealed her bouquet, and recollecting the events of the morning, made a shrewd guess at his companion. Perhaps she would have thought him very stupid had it been otherwise. All this elaborate artifice of disguise may have been for her own deception, not his. She might talk to him more freely under protest, as it were, that he had no right to know her; and she was, moreover, so well enveloped and altered, that she could scarcely be identified by passing acquaintances, or, indeed, by anyone with whom she refused to converse.

"I seek only amusement," answered the musketeer, with the natural instinct of mankind to disavow sentiment. "I have not yet found much, I confess, though Point d'Appui's airs and graces in the dance there would afford it to anyone who had not seen them as often as I have."

She laughed scornfully, leaning on his arm.

"And they call that thing *a man!*" said she, with an accent on the substantive extremely uncomplimentary to Count Point d'Appui, who was indeed a handsome, conceited, pleasant, young good-for-nothing enough; "and these are the objects women break their hearts about—dress for them, dance for them, die for them; nay, even come to masked balls, disfigured and disguised for their unworthy sakes. What fools you must think us, Captain George; and what fools we are!"

"You know me, madame," exclaimed the musketeer, affecting surprise, rather as entering into the spirit of the scene than with any deeper motive. "You must know, then, that I am amongst the most devoted and respectful admirers of your sex."

She laughed again the low soft laugh that was one of her greatest charms, and lost, moreover, none of its attraction from her disguise.

"Know you!" she repeated, still leaning on his arm, perhaps a little heavier than before. "What lady in Paris does not know you as the citadel to resist all her efforts of attack?—as the Orson, the woman-hater, the man of marble, who has no vanity, no feelings, no heart?—the only creature left in this uninteresting town worth conquering? And all those who have tried it, no small number, vow that victory is impossible."

"It shows how little they comprehend me," he replied, in a tone of jest, and still pretending not to recognise his companion, who held her head down and took refuge studiously beneath her mask. "If you, madame, would condescend to become better acquainted with me, you would soon learn the falsehood of these ladies' reports to my discredit!"

"Discredit!" she echoed, and to his surprise, nay, to his dismay, a tear fell on the gloved hand within his arm. What could he do but dry it with a kiss? "Discredit!" she said again, in a tone of increasing emotion. "How little you must understand us if you can make use of such a term! Who would care to possess that which half the town has worn and thrown away? What is the value of a heart that has been cut into little scraps and shreds, and left in portions at different friends' houses like gifts on New-year's-day? No, monsieur, if I must give all I am worth for a diamond, let it be such a diamond as the Regent's—large, clear, and entire—not a collection of fragments only held together by their golden setting, like a necklace of Madame de Sabran or Madame de Parabére."

Captain George did not quite follow out the metaphor, his attention being at this moment somewhat distracted by a figure that reminded him of Cerise, yet that he felt was as unlike Cerise as possible. The musketeer was also a very moderate proficient in the lighter accomplishments of gallantry, being of a self-contained though energetic nature, that was disposed to do its work thoroughly or not at all. He was one of those men, of whom there are more in the world than ladies suppose, whose respect for the sex restrains them from taking that initiative which they forget the latter are especially privileged to decline. Unless therefore a woman throws herself at their heads, they make no advances at all, and then these wretches are just the sort of characters with which such a course, repugnant to their instinctive sense of fitness, is least likely to succeed, after all. They are consequently very difficult birds to tame, and either escape altogether, or are lured into the cage, accidentally as it were, by a pretty face, a shy manner, and some rare combination of circumstances which nobody on earth could have foreseen. When a lady has fairly started, however, and got warmed to her subject, I imagine little is to be gained by interrupting her, and that no efforts of eloquence find so much favour as the forbearance of a good listener. The marquise thought she had turned her last phrase very prettily, and applied the image of the necklace

with considerable art, so she continued, without waiting for an answer—

"You do not know me, Captain George, though I know *you*. Also, I mention no names, therefore I break no confidences. Do you remember the day the late king was taken ill, and brought home, never to recover?"

His English blood stirred at the recollection of that gallant stag-hunt, and his eye brightened. She observed it, and not sharing the insular passion for an innocent pursuit, drew her conclusions accordingly.

"I have not forgotten it," he replied calmly, "nor the beautiful marquise and her barb!"

She trembled with pleasure, but commanded her voice, and repeated indifferently, "Ah! the beautiful marquise! I fancy she nearly rode the poor barb to death that day. What will a woman not do when her heart is interested? Well, monsieur, have you ever spoken since to the *beautiful* marquise, as you call her, doubtless in ridicule?"

He began to think he *had* been somewhat remiss, and that to prosecute his intimacy with the mother would have been the easiest way of obtaining access to the daughter. He was not given to self-examination, and did not perceive that his very love for Cerise had prevented him yet entering the house.

"Do you know the Marquise de Montmirail?" was all he could find at the moment to say.

"A little!" answered the mask, nodding her head. "But I have an intimate friend who is very intimate with her indeed. You think women cannot be friends, monsieur; you think they have no hearts; you little know the lady of whom we speak. You see her as the world does, and you judge her accordingly. How blind men are! If your eyes are not dazzled by self-conceit, they are bandaged by an impenetrable and cold egotism. A thing must touch your very noses, close like that," and she thrust her pretty hand up within an inch of his face, "or you will not believe in its existence. Nevertheless, I could sometimes find it in my heart to envy you your callousness, your stupidity, your indifference, and to wish that I had been born a man."

I think at the moment he almost wished it too, for although the voice was very fascinating, and the situation not without its charm, she encumbered him sadly in his search for the young lady whom yet he did not the least expect to find. The marquise, however, was quite satisfied with her position, and disposed to improve the occasion.

"A woman can have no *friends*," she proceeded, speaking in a low tone that the music rendered inaudible to all but her companion. "How I wish she could! I know the sort of one I should choose—brave, steadfast, constant, self-controlled; a gallant soldier, a loyal gentleman; above all, a man uninfluenced by every eye that flashes, every lip that smiles. And yet—and yet," she added, while her soft voice sank to a whisper as the music rose and swelled, "such an one would soon cease to be a friend. Because—because"—

"Because why?" he asked, bending tenderly over her, for it was not in man's nature to remain uninfluenced by such words so spoken.

The dark eyes flashed through their mask, and the hand that rested on his arm clenched tight while she replied—

"Because I should love him foolishly, madly, if he cared for me; and if not—I should hate him so fiercely that"—

"You come with me from here!" said a loud good-humoured voice at this interesting juncture, while a man's hand was laid familiarly on the musketeer's shoulder. "In a quarter of an hour my coach will be waiting at the stage entrance. Not one of my roués dare face it! I want a fellow like you, who fears neither man nor devil!"

Captain George bowed low, while the mask, still leaning on his arm, curtsied to the ground.

"Highness," said he, "I shall have the honour! It is a mere duty to serve under his orders, but it becomes a pleasure when monsieur le duc commands in person."

"And to supper afterwards, of course," added very graciously a lady who was hanging on the Regent's arm, and who carried her mask in her hand. "Captain George is always welcome, as he knows, and we shall not be more than half a dozen at the outside."

Again the musketeer bowed low, and the marquise, scanning the last speaker intently, could not but acknowledge that to-night Madame de Parabére looked more than usually beautiful. The *brunette*, too, probably overrated the charms of the *blonde*, the exceeding delicacy of complexion, the softness of skin, and the innocent baby face which so fascinated the Regent. Also she thought she detected on that baby face a decided preference for the musketeer, and Madame de Montmirail was not a woman to entertain the strongest passions of her sex and leave out jealousy. Had it not been for these suspicions, the bouquet of stephanotis might have remained all night innocuous beneath her cloak, to be consumed in the stove that warmed her chocolate

when she got home. But the marquise allowed no one to cross her designs with impunity, and watching her new enemy narrowly, began to handle her weapons and prepare for action.

The Regent had been traversing the throng of revellers with Madame de Parabére on his arm; the latter, proud of her disgrace, and exulting in her infamous position as his acknowledged mistress, had bared her face, in order to receive the full tribute of admiration which her beauty really deserved. Now, while the duke stood still for a moment and exchanged a few jesting compliments and well-bred sarcasms with the passing maskers, an encounter in which he acquitted himself with considerable tact and ingenuity, his companion, dearly loving mischief, turned all her batteries on Captain George. The marquise was, therefore, left planted as one too many; a situation to which she, the spoiled child of society, was so unaccustomed, that she could have cried with vexation, but for the revenge now literally within her grasp. So she peered, and watched, and waited, like a Grey Musketeer skirmishing.

Madame de Parabére, observing the Regent's attention engaged elsewhere, whispered something to George, looking insolently the while at his companion, and laughed. Then the marquise primed her weapon, as it were, and shook the powder well up in the pan. A leaf of the rare bouquet peeped from under its covering. Madame de Parabére, flirting and ogling outrageously, as was her custom, whispered again in Captain George's ear, with a little affected laugh. It seemed to the eager watcher that her lips shaped the hated syllables—"Mulatto." It was time to take aim now, sure and deadly, preparatory to giving fire. A cluster of stephanotis showed out like ivory against the smooth black satin.

Madame de Parabére clapped her hands, and exclaimed with a child's glee,—"But, madame, what a bouquet! Madame is indeed fortunate! Such flowers are not to be procured within leagues of Paris. How exquisite! How ravishing! Madame is so good. Madame will permit me to have one little breath of their fragrance. Only one!"

The marquise hesitated. An instinct of womanly forbearance prompted mercy even to another woman. Vindictive as she felt, and with her finger on the trigger, she would yet spare her, she thought; but the insolent creature should know her enemy, and should be taught that even the Regent's favourite could not command such bouquets as the acknowledged beauty of the Court.

"They were sent me as a gift, madame," she observed haughtily, and withholding the flowers. "I value them because ours are not yet blown at the Hôtel Montmirail."

"Pardon, madame!" retorted the other, unable, now that she knew her, to forego this opening for a thrust. "Tropical, of course! From an admirer, madame? or perhaps a kinsman? Very dark, no doubt, and with close curled hair. I offer you my compliments from the bottom of my heart!"

No quarter now. She had rushed upon her fate, and must be shot down without the least compunction.

"If madame will deign to accept my bouquet," said the marquise, "she will do me the highest honour." And she displayed the whole of it, a wonder of nature, brought to perfection by art.

Madame de Parabére, giddy, thoughtless, fond of flowers, stretched her hand out eagerly, and Captain George, whose attention the Regent's conversation had diverted from this passage of arms between the ladies, turned round while she was in the act of putting them enthusiastically to her face.

He saw the situation at a glance, and his promptitude served him as usual.

"I must be ready for your Highness!" he exclaimed hurriedly, addressing the Regent, but with his eye fixed on the treacherous flowers. "Madame, I have the honour of wishing you a good-night!" he added in the same breath; while with an energetic flourish of his cocked hat he knocked them clean out of the lady's hands to a few paces' distance on the floor, letting the hat follow; and as he recovered the latter, crushing the bouquet to pieces, as if inadvertently, beneath his foot. It was the second time he had practised this manœuvre within twelve hours, and he was perfect in his lesson. Rising with an affectation of great confusion, he made his excuses to Madame de Parabére, contriving, amongst a torrent of phrases, to convey, unobserved, the single word "Beware!" And she understood him, contenting herself with a glance of intense gratitude, and an inward vow she would never rest till she had found opportunity to repay both friend and foe.

The Regent laughed heartily at the joke.

"You must have supped already, my friend," said he, "and not spared the wine-flask. So much the better; you are all the fitter for your night's work. Come! let us be moving. It is time we were off!"

Madame de Montmirail stood awhile, stupefied, paralysed, as it were, at the failure of an attack thus foiled by the last

person in whom she expected to find an opponent. The first instant she could have hated him with all the fierceness of baffled rage. The next, she felt she had never loved him half so well as now. He had thwarted her; he had tamed her; he had saved her from crime—from ruin—from *herself!* All in one glance of the keen eye, one turn of the ready hand. She acknowledged him for her master, and to her such a sentiment was as fascinating as it was new. She would have liked to burst out crying, and kneel at his feet, imploring to be forgiven, had time and place permitted so romantic an exhibition. At least, she could not let him go without another word, and Captain George, following the Regent through the crowd towards the door, felt a hand laid timidly on his arm, heard a broken voice whispering softly in his ear.

She trembled all over. Her very lips shook while she murmured—"Forgive me, monsieur! I must explain all. I *must* see you again. Where do you go to-night?"

"To sup with his Highness," answered the musketeer, keeping the duke's figure in sight as it threaded the jostling, shifting throng of noisy revellers.

"But that is not till midnight," she urged. "He said something about duty. You are brave! You are rash! For Heaven's sake, promise you will not rush into needless danger!"

He laughed good-humouredly, and reassured her at once.

"Danger, madame! Nothing of the kind. I can trust you not to gossip. It is a mere frolic. We are going a league or two out of Paris, *to raise the devil!*"

And observing the duke turning back for him, he escaped from her and was lost in the crowd. She looked longingly after him, and sighed.

"To raise the devil!" she repeated, pressing both hands on her heart. "And not the only one to-night. Alas! you have raised one here that none but yourself can lay!"

Then the marquise, still retaining her disguise, passed hastily through the ball, till she reached the street, and gaining her carriage, was driven straight home to the Hôtel Montmirail, weeping, softly and patiently, behind her mask.

CHAPTER XVI

RAISING THE DEVIL

THE Black Musketeers on duty cleared a lane for the Regent at the door, and the lower orders, with whom, despite his bad character, a certain joviality of manner made him no small favourite, cheered vociferously as he passed.

"The Débonnaire goes home early," said one.

"He has a child in the pot for supper," shouted another.

"I wish his Highness would ask me to eat with him!" exclaimed a third.

"Or drink with him!" added a fourth. While a little hunchback, hideous and distorted, observed, in a dry, shrill voice, that made itself heard above all the clamour, "His Highness has a *rendezvous*, I tell you! Lads, where are your manners? Débonnaire! send me the bones to pick when you've done with them!"

A peal of laughter and a volley of cheers followed his state coach as it rolled off at a slow, lumbering trot, with which a man on foot could easily keep up. Captain George had been directed to do so, and accompanied it to the entrance of a gloomy narrow street, where the tall cloaked figure of Bras-de-Fer was waiting, according to orders. Here it stopped, the Regent alighted rapidly, and signing to his coachman to drive on, dived into a gulf of darkness, closely attended by the musketeer and his comrade. A few paces brought them to an open *calèche*, drawn by a pair of English horses, driven from the saddle, and containing one solitary occupant, also enveloped in a cloak, who leaped out when he heard footsteps, and uncovered while he assisted the Regent to his place. He then seated himself opposite; Bras-de-Fer followed his example; Captain George, at a signal from the duke, placed himself by his Highness; and in a few minutes the whole party were across the Seine, beyond the barrier, which had been thrown back, and clattering along a paved road at a gallop through the open country. The moon came out as they cleared Paris, and each man looked in the other's

face to read, according to their respective temperaments, signs of amusement, self-confidence, anxiety, or alarm. The duke, though nervous, seemed strung to a certain pitch of resolution. Bras-de-Fer swelled with pride at the royal confidence thus reposed in him; and Captain George smiled quietly to mark the trepidation of their fourth companion, none other than Signor Stefano Bartoletti—chemist, philosopher, astrologer, professor of medicine, mathematics, and magic,—black or white as required.

It is strange how the most effective impostors become so saturated, as it were, with their profession, that they cannot resist the influence of a vague enthusiasm which breeds artificial belief, fascinating, though transparently absurd, in the tricks they themselves practise. Perhaps there is something of the true artist in every man who succeeds, whatever be the nature of his enterprise; and the true artist can never place himself entirely apart from, or outside of, his art. Signor Bartoletti, who had engaged to raise the enemy of mankind for the Regent's gratification, was unquestionably the most nervous of the whole party lest they should be taken at their word.

Captain George, to begin with, anticipated nothing but a trick, and took the matter, therefore, as coolly as he did everything else unconnected with Cerise de Montmirail. Bras-de-Fer, on the contrary, was persuaded he should be called on to confront the arch-fiend in person; but believing himself a good Catholic, while he knew he was an excellent swordsman, his courage rose, and he smiled grimly in his moustache at the thought of so distinguished an adversary. Even the devil, he argued, could not be much worse than Marlborough's Grenadiers, and he had faced them many a time without getting the worst of the encounter. He even calculated whether he might not bring into play, with considerable effect, the thrust lately introduced into the corps by Beaudésir, but postponed further consideration of the point till he should know what kind of weapons were to be used in the field. The Regent, excited, credulous, impressible, loving the marvellous, and inclined to believe anything that was *not* in the Bible, found his spirits rise with the anticipation of a new distraction; and being in that exalted state which those experience at rare intervals whose orgies are alternated with strong intellectual labour, found himself actually dreading a disappointment in the vision he anticipated.

Bartoletti felt how uncomfortably it would turn out, if after all the pains of Malletort and himself to instruct the

actress in her part, after all their care in scenery, decorations, and rehearsal, the original should take it into his head to assist at the performance in person! Ere they were a league out of Paris his teeth began to chatter, though his breath smelt strong of the last suck of brandy that had comforted him before they started. The English horses drew them swift as the wind. It seemed but a short half-hour ere they stopped at a gate opening into a wood, shadowy, dark, and dreadful, after the dusty road and level meadows glistening silver-white in the moonlight. The two musketeers, accustomed to look about them, perceived at their feet a track of wheels, which had obviously preceded their carriage. Bras-de-Fer felt a little disappointed.

"*L'affaire commence!*" whispered the Regent, loosening his sword, as he prepared to follow Bartoletti through the wood. "Keep close to me, gentlemen, and look that we be not taken in rear!"

The path was narrow, winding, and exceedingly dark; but after a furlong or two the party emerged on an open space, and found their progress stopped by a level wall of rock, hewn perfectly smooth, and several yards in height. Bathed in a strong moonlight, every particle on its gritty surface glistened like crystal, and its crest of stunted trees and thick-growing shrubs cut clear and black against the cloudless sky. Here the adept halted and looked round.

"Highness," he whispered, "we have reached our journey's end; have you courage to enter the cave?"

The duke's face was pale, but he glanced at his two musketeers, and answered, "After you, monsieur!"

Then the four, in Indian file, turned through an opening, or rather a mere hole in the rock, to follow a low, narrow passage, in which, ere they had advanced three paces, the darkness became impenetrable. They groped their way in silence, each listening to the hard breathing of his predecessor. Bras-de-Fer, who was last, fervently hoping their ghostly enemy might not attack them until, as he would have expressed it, they could deploy into line.

The corridor, however, as we may call it, grew wider and loftier at every step. Presently they marched upright, and two abreast. There was a constant drip from the damp stone that encircled them, and the hard smooth surface on which they trod felt cool and refreshing to their feet. Bras-de-Fer could not restrain a sneeze. It resounded above their heads, and died away farther and fainter in a hundred whispering echoes.

Bartoletti started violently, and the duke's hand went to his sword. Then the magician halted, pulled a vial from his breast, and dipping a match in it, produced a strong rose-coloured flame, from which he lit the small lamp that hung at his belt. Whilst the match flared and shone, they saw plainly for several yards in every direction. They were in a low vaulted cavern, hewn, to all appearance, by no mortal hands, out of the rock. They stood on a slightly elevated platform, and at their feet lay a glistening sheet of black that could only be water. It was, however, a hasty examination, for the match soon spent itself, and Bartoletti's lamp gave but light enough, as Bras-de-Fer observed, "to show how dark it was."

"Are we on the banks of the Seine or the Styx?" asked the Regent jestingly, yet with a slight tremor in his voice.

"Man knoweth not whither this dark stream may lead," replied Bartoletti solemnly, lighting at the same time a spare wick of his lamp, to embark it on a morsel of wood which he pushed into the current.

For several minutes, as it seemed to their watching eyes, the light floated farther and farther, till swallowed up by degrees in the black distance. All were now somewhat impressed with the gloom and mysterious silence of the place. Bartoletti took courage, and informed the Regent he was about to begin.

"Not till you have drawn a pentacle!" objected the duke apprehensively. "Such a precaution should on no account be neglected."

"It is unnecessary, Highness," answered the other. "Against the lesser fiends, indeed, it forms an impregnable defence; but he who is approaching now, the very Prince of Darkness himself, cares no more for a pentacle than you do!"

The Regent would not be satisfied, however, till, under Bartoletti's superintendence, he had drawn with the point of his sword a circle and triangle in magic union on the bare rock. Then he ensconced himself carefully within his lines, and bade the magician go on.

After a considerable display of mummery, and the repetition of many sentences, which, as they were couched in Latin, Bartoletti felt would be liable to little criticism from his listeners, he produced a small bundle of shavings from under his cloak, and piling these on the water's edge, poured over the heap certain essences, ere he set the whole on fire. The cavern now became filled with a thick cloud of smoke, fragrant in smell, and though stupefying to the senses, not suffocating the lungs. Reflected in the black water beneath,

as the flames waved and leaped and flickered, the unsteady light produced an effect of vast and shadowy distance on the dim recesses of the cavern, and prepared the minds of the spectators for some vague, uncertain, yet awful result. Plunging it once more into his bundle, Bartoletti spread his hand over the embers. A blue lurid glare, that turned all their faces ashen white, now replaced the shifting wavering light of the flames.

"It is the death-fire!" whispered the Italian; and touching the duke's shoulder, he pointed to the roof of the cavern.

A gigantic arm and hand, with forefinger pointed downwards, were shadowed distinctly on its ribbed and slimy surface.

The duke trembled and sweat stood on his brow; Bartoletti, too, shivered, though with less reason. Captain George nodded approvingly, and Bras-de-Fer pulled the buckle of his sword-belt to the front.

"You may ask three questions," whispered the shaking Italian. "Not another syllable, if you would leave the cave alive!"

The duke cleared his throat to speak, and his voice came dry and husky, while he formed the words with effort, like a man using a foreign tongue.

"I adjure you, tell me truly, who is my chief enemy?"

Not one of them drew breath whilst they waited for the answer; and the questioner himself looked down to see that his feet were scrupulously within the pentacle.

It came sad, solemn, and as if from a distance, chanted in a full, mournful and melodious tone—

> "The foes a prince behoves to dread, that turn and tear their lord,
> Are those that haunt about his bed, and blush beside his board."

Then the Regent, gaining courage, asked in a firmer voice, "Who is my best friend?"

The reply was more distinct, and its clear emphasis seemed to vouch for the speaker's truth, Father of Lies though he might be called—

> "One friend is thine, whose silent kiss clings subtle, sure, and fast;
> When all shall fail, yet shall not this, the swiftest, though the last."

Thus encouraged, the royal questioner gathered heart, with every fresh answer, and it was in his customary unrestrained tone that he propounded his last inquiry, "Shall I live to wear the crown of France?"

This time, however, the phantom arm waved backwards and forwards, clenching its gigantic hand, while the demon's voice seemed again to rise from distant and mysterious depths, as it replied—

"When woman's love can trust thy vows, when woman's guileless glance
Can thrill thy breast, bind on thy brows the diadem of France!
Enough! For more I dare not tell. Glad life, and lusty reign!
Predestined Prince, and fare thee well!—till we shall meet again!"

In five minutes all were once more in the open air. The Regent, grave and preoccupied, spoke not a word while they passed swiftly through the wood to gain their carriage; but Bras-de-Fer whispered in his comrade's ear, "It seems the devil is like the rest, and had rather not come to close quarters with the Grey Musketeers." To which professional remark Captain George replied thoughtfully—

"He is an adversary for whom I would choose a weapon that kept me as far off him as possible!"

CHAPTER XVII

A QUIET SUPPER

IN less than an hour, how changed the scene for two of the actors in that mysterious drama—of which Bartoletti was chief manager and Malletort sat in the prompter's box! The captain of musketeers had been invited to sup with the Regent, and found in his prince's private apartments a little party collected, whose mirth and high spirits were well calculated to drive away any remains of superstitious gloom left by the incantations of the cavern and their result.

The select suppers of the Duke of Orleans were conducted with an absence of ceremony or restraint that indeed degenerated on occasion into the grossest license; but even under the Regency men did not necessarily conclude every night in the week with an orgy, and the mirth of the *roués* themselves was not always degraded into drunkenness, nor their wit pushed to profanity and shameless indecency of speech. Captain George found himself seated at a round table in an oval room, of which the only other occupants, besides his royal host, were Madame de Parabére, Madame de Sabran, Malletort, and Count Point d'Appui. The latter, be it observed, excelled (for no one was admitted to these reunions who had not some marked speciality) in the grace with which he danced a minuet and the gravity with which he propounded the emptiest and silliest remarks. Some of the courtiers affected to think this simplicity only masked an intriguing disposition, and that Point d'Appui was, after all, "not quite such a fool as he looked." A charitable suggestion, endorsed by Madame de Sabran with the observation, "The saints forbid he should be!"

Altogether it was generally admitted that the count's

strong point must be sought rather in his heels than his head. He sat directly opposite the musketeer, and next to Abbé Malletort, who was between him and Madame de Sabran. The latter was thus placed opposite the Regent, at whose right hand Madame de Parabére had taken up her usual post. Captain George found himself accordingly with a lady on either side, and as he was distinguished, manly, quiet in manner, and above all, supposed to be impenetrable of heart, he became an object of interest to both. These hated each other, of course, but in a treacherous, well-bred manner, and not so rancorously as to spoil their appreciation of an excellent repast, served in pleasant company, under all the most promising conditions for success. They were therefore, outwardly, wondrous affectionate, and under protest as it were, with the buttons on their foils, could be good companions enough.

The duke prided himself on his suppers. Working at state affairs during the day, and with a digestion considerably impaired by habitual excess, dinner was a mere matter of form, often restricted indeed to a morsel of bread and a cup of chocolate, served in the cabinet where he wrote. But when the hours of business were past, and his system, too much gorged over-night, had recovered from the fumes of wine and the torpor of repletion, it was his delight to rush once more into those excesses of appetite which unfitted his mornings for exertion, which robbed him of half his existence while he lived, and killed him in the prime of manhood at last. But he understood well how the sacrifice should be offered. The supper-room, we have said, was oval, panelled in a light cheerful wood, highly varnished, and decorated only by short pithy sentences, inlaid in gaudy colours, of which the purport was to crop the flower while it bloomed, to empty the cup while it sparkled, practically, to eat the cutlet while it was hot, and consume as eagerly as possible the good things provided for the senses. No pictures, no vases, no works of art were suffered upon the walls to distract the attention of the guests from their main object. The intellect, as seated at the farthest distance from the stomach, might indeed be gently stimulated with wit, but the imagination, the feelings, above all, the emotions that affect the heart, were on no account to be disturbed during the ecstasies of the palate or the pleasing languor and subsequent comfort of digestion. Not a lackey nor servant of any kind entered the room. When one course had been consumed, deliberately, methodically, and with much practical comment on its merits, the table sank slowly through

the floor, to be replaced by another, bearing fresh dishes, fresh flowers, fresh napkins, everything fresh prepared, to the very bills of fare, beautifully emblazoned, that lay beside the cover of each guest. A strong light from above was shaded to throw its rays directly on the board; but as plenty of this enlivener is conducive to festivity, numerous lamps with bright reflectors flashed at short distances from the walls. No pealing band deafened the ears of the sitters, or drowned their conversation in its overpowering strains; only ever and anon a faint long-drawn note, like the tone of a far-distant organ, rose and fell and wavered, ere it died sweetly and calmly away. On these occasions, Point d'Appui never failed to pause, even with a tempting morsel on his fork, and intimate to his neighbours that "he was passionately given to music, and it reminded him of heaven!"

The Regent seemed much impressed with the visit he had made to the cavern before supper, and it was not till he had emptied several goblets of champagne that he regained his usual spirits. With the influence of wine, however, his nerves recovered their tone, his eye brightened, his hand steadied, and he joined in conversation as heretofore.

By this time a favourite dish had made its appearance, which went by the name of the *pâté d'Orleans*. It consisted of the wings of pheasants and other white game, boned, stuffed, and so manipulated as to resemble the limbs of children; a similarity that gave rise to the most hideous rumours amongst the lower classes. Many a worthy gossip in Paris believed firmly that two or three infants were consumed nightly at the Regent's table, and none seemed to relish the report more than himself. He ate vigorously of the *pâté*, emptied another goblet, and began to talk. Madame de Parabére watched him closely. Something was going on she had not fathomed, but she resolved to be at the bottom of it.

"Abbé!" shouted the duke, "what are you about? Do you think I would suffer little heathens on my table, that you baptize them with water? They are the best of Christians, I tell you, my friend, and should be well soused, like all good Christians, in wine."

Malletort, who had been pouring stealthily out of a carafe at his elbow, accepted his host's challenge, and filled up from a flask.

"To your health, Highness! and confusion to your enemies —White and Red," said he, pointing to two measures of those burgundies that happened to stand before the ladies.

The duke started. Malletort's observation, simple as it

seemed, brought the diabolical prophecy to his mind, and again he sought courage from his glass.

"Do you mean that for *us*, monsieur?" asked Madame de Sabran; "since his Highness loves the burgundy too well to count it a foe, though it has put him on his back, I doubt not, often enough."

"Nay, madame," answered the abbé, bowing politely; "such as you can never be foes, since you are born to be conquerors. If it did come to a fight, I presume you would grant no quarter."

"None," said she, laughing. "Church and laymen, we should put you all to the sword."

"But the Church are non-combatants," interposed Count Point d'Appui, with perfect sincerity. "You would be excommunicated by our Father the Pope. It is a different species, madame, altogether—a separate race."

"Not a bit of it!" answered the lady. "Men to the tips of their fingers, every one of them! Are you not, abbé? No! When all is said and done, there are but two distinct creations, and I never can believe they have a common origin. Men and women I put in the one, princes and lackeys in the other. What say *you*, madame?"

But Madame de Parabére said nothing. She sat in silence, pouting, because it suited the shape of her mouth, and listening, for other reasons of her own.

The Regent, who had now drunk wine enough to be both easily offended and appeased, felt that the shaft aimed at him was not entirely undeserved. So he asked, in anger, "How mean you, madame? I see not the drift of your jest. In what are princes and lackeys so alike, and so different from the rest of mankind?"

"Other bipeds," answered the lady bitterly, "lie from habit, with intention, or on occasion; but this variety never speaks the truth at all, even by accident."

The duke's face turned purple. Captain George, hoping to divert an explosion, and feeling that he had been invited rather as a compliment than for the sake of his society, rose and took his leave, on the score of military duty; receiving, as he went out, a glance from Madame de Parabére's beautiful eyes, that assured him of her gratitude, her interest, and her goodwill. His departure changed the subject of conversation. In two minutes the Regent forgot he had been offended, and Madame de Sabran was busied in the unworthy task of mystifying Count Point d'Appui, an employment which her rival contemplated with a drowsy, languid air, as if she could

hardly keep herself awake. The abbé had watched her for some time with increasing interest and considerable misgivings; the poison, he thought, should long ere this have taken effect, and he expected every moment to observe a disturbance of the placid features, a discoloration of the beautiful skin. Before supper was over, he concluded that, as far as the flowers were concerned, his plot had failed; but Malletort did not now need to learn the archer's want of another arrow in the quiver, a spare string for the bow: it behoved him only to make the more use of such implements as he had kept in reserve. All his energy and all his cunning had been brought into play during the night. Without his assistance, he felt sure the mummery of the cavern must have failed, for he could trust neither the shaking nerves of the Italian nor the superstitious self-deception of the quadroon. It was no easy task to return to Paris so swiftly as to change his dress, show himself at a reception in the Faubourg St. Germain, and thence proceed leisurely to sup with the Regent. Well-bred horses, however, and a well-broke valet, had accomplished this part of the undertaking, with a few seconds to spare. It now remained to play the last and most difficult strokes of the game. He felt equal to the occasion.

Moving round the table with his glass, in unceremonious fashion, he took advantage of George's departure to place himself between Madame de Parabére and her host, whispering in that lady's ear, "I have a favour to ask of the Regent, in which you, too, are interested!" She made room for him carelessly, listlessly, and her face looked so innocent and unsuspicious as to delude even his acuteness into the belief that the few faculties she could command were engrossed by Point d'Appui and his tormentor. These were in full swing at a game called, in England, Flirtation. It is an elastic process, embracing an extensive area in the field of gallantry, and so far resembling the tournaments of the Middle Ages, that while its encounters are presumed to be waged with weapons of courtesy, blunted for bloodless use, such fictitious conflicts very frequently bring on the real combat *à outrance* with sharp weapons, and then, as in other death-struggles—*væ victis!* If girth breaks, or foot slips, the fallen fighter must expect no mercy.

Pitted against Point d'Appui, Madame de Sabran might be likened to an accomplished swordsman practising cut and thrust on a wooden trunk. But the block was good-natured and good-looking. When such is the case, I have observed that a witty woman takes no small delight in the exercise

of her talent. There is a generosity about the sex not sufficiently appreciated, and if a man will only keep quiet, silent, receptive, and immovable, it will pour its treasures at his feet in a stream of lavish and inexhaustible profusion. Point d'Appui contented himself with looking very handsome and drinking a great deal of burgundy. His neighbour hacked and hewed him without intermission, and Madame de Parabére's attention seemed entirely engrossed by the pair. Malletort, in possession of the Regent's ear, proceeded diligently with the edifice for which he had so artfully laid the foundations.

"I must ask permission to take my leave early to-night, Highness," observed the churchman. "Like our friend the musketeer, who has served his purpose, by the way, as I learn, so may I be rubbed out of the calculation; and I must drink no more of this excellent burgundy, for I have promised to present myself in a lady's drawing-room, late as it is, before I go to bed."

Though somewhat confused by wine, the Regent understood his confidant's meaning perfectly well, and his eye kindled as he gathered its purport.

"I will accompany you, little abbé," he whispered, with a hiccough, and a furtive glance at the ladies, lest they should overhear.

"Too late, my prince," answered the other, "and useless besides, even for you, since I have not yet obtained permission. Oh! trust me. The fortress is well guarded, and has scarce ever been summoned; much less has it offered a parley."

The duke looked disappointed, but emptied another bumper. He was rapidly arriving at the state Malletort desired, when a well-turned compliment would have induced him to sign away the crown of France.

"To-morrow then," he grunted, with his hand on the abbé's shoulder. "The great Henry used to say—what used he to say? Something about waiting; you remember, abbé. *Basta!* Reach me the burgundy."

"To-morrow, Highness," answered Malletort, more and more respectfully, as his patron became less able to enforce respect. "At the hour agreed on, I will be at your orders with everything requisite. There is but one more detail, and though indispensable, I fear to press it with your Highness now, for it trenches on business, and your brain, like mine, must be somewhat heated with the burgundy."

Probably no other consideration on earth would have

induced the duke to look at a paper after supper, but this remark about the burgundy touched him nearly. He took pride in his convivial powers, and remembering that Henri Quatre was said to have drunk a glass of red wine before his infant lips had tasted mother's milk, always vowed that he inherited from that ancestor a constitution with which the juice of the grape assimilated itself harmlessly as food.

"Burgundy, little abbé!" he repeated, staring vacantly at Malletort, who had produced a small packet and an inkhorn from his pockets. "Burgundy, beaune, brandy—these do but serve to clear the brains of a Bourbon! Give me the paper!"

"It is only your signature, Highness," said Malletort, sitting completely round, so as to interpose his person between Madame de Parabére and the sheet under his hand. "I can fill it up afterwards, to save you further trouble."

But a drunkard's cunning is the last faculty that forsakes him. Though the paper danced and wavered beneath his gaze, he detected at once that it was a *lettre de cachet*—formidable, henceforth, from the edict issued that day in Council. Without troubling himself to inquire how the document came into Malletort's possession, who had indeed free access to his *bureau*, he wagged his head gravely, exclaiming, with the good-humoured persistency of inebriety—

"No! no! little abbé. A thousand times no! I fill in the names myself. Oh! I am Regent of France. I know what I am doing. Here, give me the pen."

He scrawled his signature on the page, and waited for Malletort to speak. The abbé glanced furtively round—Madame de Sabran was laughing, the count listening, Madame de Parabére yawning. No one seemed to pay attention. Nevertheless he was still cautious. Mentioning no names, he looked expressively at the musketeer's vacant place, while he whispered—"We have done with him. He has fulfilled his task. Let him be well taken care of. He deserves it, and it is indispensable."

"What is indispensable, must be!" answered the duke carelessly, and filled in the name of the victim on the blank space left for it.

Then he sprinkled some blue sand from the abbé's portable writing-case over the characters; and because they did not dry fast enough, turned the sheet face downwards on the white tablecloth, and passed his wrist once or twice across the back. When he lifted it, the ink had marked the damask, which was of the finest texture and rarest pattern in Europe.

A QUIET SUPPER

Malletort never neglected a precaution. Reaching his hand to a flask of white Hermitage, and exclaiming—"We chemists are never without resource," he was about to pour from it on the table, when a soft voice murmured languidly, "Give me a few drops, monsieur, I am thirsty," and Madame de Parabére, half turning round, held her glass out to be helped. He was forced to comply, but in another second had flooded the ink-marks with Hermitage, and blurred the stains on the cloth into one faded shapeless blot.

Madame de Parabére's face remained immovable, and her fine eyes looked sleepy as ever, yet in that second she had read a capital *G*, with a small *r*, reversed, and had drawn her own conclusions. There is but one sentiment in a woman's mind stronger than gratitude — its name is love. Nevertheless, her love for the Regent was not so overpowering as to shake her determination that she would save the captain of musketeers at any sacrifice.

Meanwhile, the object of her solicitude returned to his quarters by way of the Hôtel Montmirail, coasting the dead wall surrounding that mansion very slowly, and absorbed in his own reflections. To reach it he diverged considerably from his direct road, although the guard posted in its vicinity consisted that night of Black Musketeers, who were not to be relieved till the next afternoon by their comrades of the Grey Company. To prove their vigilance seemed, however, the aim of Captain George's walk, for after a brief reconnoitre, he retired quietly to rest about the time that his royal host, with the assistance of two valets, staggered from banqueting-room to bedchamber. And no wonder, for notwithstanding a liberal consumption of champagne, the flasks of red and white burgundy stood empty on the supper-table.

CHAPTER XVIII

BAITING THE TRAP

IN transactions with womankind, the sharpest of men are apt to overlook in their calculations the paramount influence of dress.

Malletort had long ago expressed an opinion on the despotism of King Chiffon, but he little expected to be thwarted by that monarch in dealing with one of his most devoted subjects. When Captain George knocked the poisoned bouquet out of Madame de Parabére's hand, with a happy awkwardness seldom displayed in ballrooms, a cluster of its blossoms caught in the flounces of her dress. Despite languor of manner and immobility of feature, this lady possessed coolness, resolution, and resource in emergency. She concealed the stray cluster in her handkerchief, said nothing about it, took it home, put it under glass, and then locked it carefully away in a cabinet. After she had heard mass next morning, she walked quietly off to Bartoletti's house, attended by two armed domestics and accompanied by her maid, as if going to buy cosmetics, and produced the blossoms for that unwilling chemist to analyse. The signor, to tell the truth, was always averse to tampering with poisons, although in the way of business it was difficult to keep clear of them. As, on the present occasion, he felt nothing was to be gained by falsehood, as Madame de Parabére was a dangerous enemy to provoke, and above all, as she paid him liberally, he produced his tests without delay, and informed her she had narrowly escaped loss of beauty, if not of life, by the inhalation of a subtle and effectual poison.

The signor argued in this way. He compromised nobody, neither was it any business of his that certain ingredients, sold to a brother student in separate quantities, had been scientifically mingled and sprinkled over these treacherous exotics. With the sums he had lately received from the abbé on different accounts—with the liberal reward now brought

him by Madame de Parabére—with the proceeds from his shares in Mississippi stock, of a feverish rise in which he had, by his friend's advice, taken immediate advantage—with the sale of his wine, pictures, plate, and furniture—lastly, with the firm determination to abscond promptly, leaving his debts unpaid, he should find himself master of so much wealth as would enable him to purchase the freedom of Célandine (at a damaged valuation), to marry her, and settle down somewhere, perhaps under the glowing sky of the tropics, in luxury and scientific indolence for the rest of his life. Sensualist and impostor though he was, the man had yet some glimmering of a better and nobler existence than his necessities had hitherto permitted him to lead. He saw himself basking in the sun, sleeping in the shade, eating luxuriantly, drinking of the best, lying soft, yet devoting his leisure to the interests of science, and, when it did not interfere with his gratifications, giving those who needed help the benefit of his medical experience and advice. There are few but can be pitiful while they want occupation, and generous while it costs them nothing but a word.

When Bartoletti attended his visitor to the door, he felt it would be neither wise nor prudent to remain longer in Paris.

Madame de Parabére did not act without reflection. She possessed in his own handwriting, with his own signature attached, the chemist's analysis of the noxious essences that had been offered her in a nosegay; and although Bartoletti extorted the price of a necklace for it, she felt the document was cheap at the money. Instinct told her that in the Marquise de Montmirail she had found a rival; but reason assured her also that with such proofs as she now possessed she could ruin any rival in the Regent's good graces as soon as he had slept off the effects of last night's wine. Though his whole afternoon, as often happened, might be engaged, she must meet her royal admirer that evening at the opera. He should then be put in possession of the facts, and woe to the traitress when he knew the truth!

"We shall see, madame!" said the lady, between her small white teeth, under the sweet, calm face, and crossing herself as she passed a crucifix in the street. "We shall see! A *lettre de cachet* is a very compromising *billet-doux*, but it may be sent to a lady quite as appropriately as a gentleman. That reminds me! Business first—pleasure afterwards; gratitude to-day — vengeance to-night. I will preserve that brave musketeer, if it costs me my rank and my reputation. Oh! if men were all prompt, generous, honourable, like him, how

differently we poor women should behave! I wonder if we should be much better or much worse?"

The maid walking at her side thought she was repeating an "Ave," and appreciating the temptations of her mistress, greatly admired so edifying a display of piety under difficulties.

Madame de Parabére was perfectly right in believing she would have no opportunity for conversation with the Regent till they met at the opera. The whole of that prince's morning was employed in struggling with the drowsy fiend who on a sensualist's couch represents sleep, and is such a hideous mockery of its original. At these hours the tendency to apoplexy, which the duke strengthened and pampered by indulgence, displayed itself in alarming colours, and none of his attendants could have been surprised when, a few years later, the destroyer swooped down and carried off his prey at a stroke. It took him many an hour of heavy, unhealthy, and disturbed slumber to regain sufficient clearness of mind for the duties of the day, but once in exercise, his intellect, which was doubtless above mediocrity, soon reasserted itself, and the prince, shaved, bathed, dressed, and seated over a pile of papers in his cabinet, seemed quite capable of grasping the political helm, and guiding with a steady hand the destinies of France. But it was only by a strong mental effort he thus overcame the effects of his pernicious habits; such an effort as, when often repeated, saps the vital energies beyond the power of nature to restore them, and the wasting effects of which are best conveyed by the familiar expression —burning the candle at both ends.

When business was concluded, and the Regent, leaving his cabinet, entered the adjoining dressing-room to prepare for amusement, he was generally much fatigued, but in excellent spirits. A thorough Bourbon, he could work if it was necessary, but his native element was play. When he shut up his portfolio the virtual king of France felt like a boy out of school. It was in such a mood the Abbé Malletort found him the afternoon succeeding his necromantic visit to the cavern. The valets were dismissed, the wardrobe stood open, various suits of clothes hung on chairs or lay scattered about the floor, yet it seemed the visitor was expected; for no sooner did he enter than the door was locked, and his Highness, taking him by the shoulders, accosted him with a rough, good-humoured welcome.

"True to time," said he, in a boisterous yet somewhat nervous tone. "True and punctual as a tailor, a confessor,

and a creditor should be!—since for me, little abbé, you combine these several characters in one! A tailor, for you must dress me; a confessor, for you know most of my sins already, and I have no desire to conceal from you the remainder; and a creditor, because I owe you a heavy debt of gratitude which you need not fear I shall forget to pay!"

"Tailor and confessor as much as your Highness pleases," answered the abbé, "but creditor, no! I had rather possess the free assurance of the Regent's goodwill than his name to a blank assignment on the Bank of France! It is my pride and my pleasure to be at your service, and only when the duke shall propose a scheme to his own manifest disadvantage will the abbé find courage to expostulate or refuse."

"I can trust you, I believe," answered the Regent, "none the less, my friend, that your interests and mine are identical. If d'Orleans were at Dourlens, and Du Maine at the Tuileries, it is just possible Malletort might find himself at Vincennes. What say you, my adventurous abbé? Such an *alerte* would call every man to his post! No; where I gain an inch I pull you up a metre; but in return, if I make a false step in the *entresol*, you tumble down two pair of stairs and break your neck in the street! Yes—I think I can trust you."

Malletort laughed pleasantly.

"Your Highness's ethics are like my own," said he. "There is no tie so close as self-interest, and it is certainly none the looser when accompanied by inclination. I trust the events of to-night will render it yet more binding on us both."

"Have you prepared everything?" asked the Regent, with anxiety. "The slightest omission might be not only inconvenient, but dangerous."

"I have but a short note to write," answered the abbé, "and I can accomplish that while your Highness finishes dressing. It must be sealed with the arms of the royal bodyguard, and you may believe I have no such uncanonical trinkets in my possession."

The duke looked in a drawer and shook his head. Then he called a valet, who appeared from the adjoining chamber.

"Go to the officer of the guard," said he, "and ask him for the regimental seal. Say it is for *me*."

The man returned almost immediately, indeed before the abbé had finished a note on which he was engaged, writing it slowly and with great care.

"Who is on guard?" he asked carelessly, while the servant set the massive seal on the table.

"Monsieur George," was the answer, "Captain of the Company of Grey Musketeers."

The abbé did not look up, but continued assiduously bent over his task, smiling the while as at some remarkable and whimsical coincidence. When he had folded his letter carefully, and secured it with the military seal, he begged his Highness, in a tone of great simplicity, to lend him an orderly.

"As many as you please," answered the Regent; "but may I ask the nature of a missive that requires so warlike a messenger?"

"It is a challenge," answered the abbé, and they both laughed heartily; nor was their mirth diminished when the required orderly, standing gaunt and rigid in the doorway, turned out to be the oldest, the fiercest, and the ugliest veteran in the whole bodyguard.

The sun was now declining, and it would soon be dusk. Malletort urged on the Regent to lose no time in preparing for his enterprise.

"And the opera?" observed the latter, suddenly recollecting his appointment with Madame de Parabére at that entertainment.

"Must be given up for to-night," answered Malletort. "There is no time for your Highness to show yourself in public, and return here for a change of dress. Moreover, your disguise cannot be properly accomplished in a hurry, and to be late by five minutes would render all our plans useless. You have promised to trust everything to me, and if your Highness will be guided by my directions, I can ensure you an undoubted success. Give me your attention, I entreat, monsieur, whilst once more I recapitulate my plan. You dismiss, now, on the instant, all your valets, except Robecque, on whom we can depend. With his assistance and mine, you disguise yourself as an officer of musketeers—Grey, of course, since that company furnishes the guard of to-night. Your Highness can thus pass through their posts, without remark, on giving the countersign supplied this morning by yourself. An escort will be provided from the barracks, at the last moment, by Marshal de Villeroy's orders, without consulting the officer of the guard. This arrangement is indispensable in case of accidents. Every contingency has been anticipated, yet swords might be drawn, and though your Highness loves the clash of steel, the most valuable life in France must not be risked even for such a prize. Ah! you may trust us men of peace to take precautions; and, in *our*

profession, when we act with the strong hand, we think we cannot make the hand too strong. Nevertheless, I anticipate no difficulties whatever. Your Highness, as a gallant musketeer, will enter the garden of the Hesperides without opposition. There is no dragon that I know of, though people sometimes pay your humble servant the compliment of believing him to hold that post; and once within, it wants but a bold hand to pluck the fruit from the bough. Win it then, my prince, and wear it happily. Nay, forget not hereafter that many a man less favoured would have bartered life willingly but to lie prostrate under the tree and look his last on the tempting beauty of the golden apple he might never hope to reach."

There was something unusual in the abbé's tone, and the duke, glancing in his face, thought he had turned very pale; but in another moment he was smiling pleasantly at his own awkwardness, while he assisted the Regent into the uniform, and fitted on the accoutrements of a musketeer. It took some little time, and cost many remonstrances from Robecque, who was not gifted with a military eye, to complete the transformation. Nevertheless, by dint of persuasion and perseverance, the moustaches were at length blacked and twisted, the belts adjusted, the boots wrinkled, and the hat cocked with that mixture of ease, fierceness, good-humour and assumption, which was indispensable to a proper conception of the character—a true rendering of the part.

It was somewhat against the grain to resign for a while the attitudes and gestures of Henri Quatre, but even such a sacrifice was little regretted when the duke scanned himself from top to toe in a long mirror, with a smile of undisguised satisfaction at the result of his toilet.

"'Tis the garrison type to the life!" said he exultingly. "Guard-room, parade, and bivouac combined. Abbé! abbé! what a flower of musketeers she spoiled when blind Fortune made me Regent of France!"

CHAPTER XIX

MATER PULCHRA, FILIA PULCHRIOR

SINCE Horace wrote that musical ode in which he expresses a poet's admiration pretty equally divided between mother and daughter, how many similes have been exhausted, how many images distorted to convey the touching and suggestive resemblance by which nature reproduces in the bud a beauty that has bloomed to maturity in the flower! Amongst all the peculiarities of race, family likeness is the commonest, the most prized, and the least understood. Perhaps, because the individuality of women is more easily affected by extraneous influences, it seems usually less impressed upon the sons than the daughters of a house. Then a girl often marries so young, that she has scarcely done with her girl's graces, certainly lost none of her woman's charms, ere she finds a copy at her side as tall as herself; a very counterpart in figure, voice, eyes, hair, complexion; all the externals in which she takes most pride; whose similarity and companionship are a source of continual happiness, alloyed only by the dread of a contingency that shall make herself a grandmother!

As they sat in the boudoir of the Hôtel Montmirail, enjoying the cool evening breeze at an open window, the marquise and her daughter might have been likened to a goddess and a nymph, a rose and a rosebud—what shall I say?—a cat and her kitten, or a cow and her calf! But although in voice, manner, gestures, and general effect, this similarity was so remarkable, a closer inspection might have found many points of difference; and the girl seemed, indeed, an ideal sketch rather than a finished portrait of the woman, bearing to her mother the vague, spiritualised resemblance that memory bears to presence—your dreams to your waking thoughts. Cerise was altogether fairer in complexion and fainter in colouring, slenderer, and perhaps a little taller, with more of soul in her blue eyes but less of intellect, and a pure, serene face that a poet would have fallen down and worshipped,

but from which a painter would have turned to study the richer tones of the marquise.

Some women seem to me like statues, and some like pictures. The latter fascinate you at once, compelling your admiration even on the first glance, while you pass by the former with a mere cold and critical approval. But every man who cares for art must have experienced how the influence of the model or the marble grows on him day by day. How, time after time, fresh beauties seem to spring beneath his gaze as if his very worship called them into life, and how, when he has got the masterpiece by heart, and sees every curve of the outline, every turn of the chisel in his dreams, he no longer wonders that it was not a painter, but a sculptor, who languished to death in hopeless adoration of his handiwork. These statue-women move, in no majestic march, over the necks of captive thousands to the strains of all kinds of music, but stand in their leafy, shadowy nooks apart, teaching a man to love them by degrees, and he never forgets the lesson, nor would he if he could.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the marquise loved her daughter very dearly. For years, the child had occupied the first place in her warm impassioned heart. To send Cerise away was the first lesson in self-sacrifice the proud and prosperous lady had ever been forced to learn, and many a tear it used to cost her, when her ball-dress had been folded up and Célandine dismissed for the night. Nor, indeed, was the quadroon's pillow quite dry when first she lost her nursling; and long after Cerise slept calmly and peacefully between those quiet convent walls, far off in Normandy, the two women would lie broad awake, calling to remembrance the blue eyes and the brown curls and the pretty ways of their darling, till their very hearts ached with longing to look on her once more. Now, since mademoiselle had returned, the marquise thought she loved her better than ever, and perhaps all the feelings and impulses of a heart not too well-disciplined had of late been called into stronger play.

Madame de Montmirail threw herself back in her chair with an exclamation of pleasure, for the cool, soft breeze lifted the hair from her temples, and stirred the delicate lace edging on her bosom.

"It is delightful, my child!" she said, "after the heat of to-day, which was suffocating. And we have nothing for to-night, I thank the saints with my whole heart! Absolutely nothing! Neither ball, nor concert, nor opera (for I could

not sit out another of Cavalli's), nor even a horrid reception at the Luxembourg. This is what I call veritable repose."

Like all people with a tinge of southern blood, the marquise cried out at the slightest increase of temperature. Like all fashionable ladies, she professed to consider those gaieties without which she could not live, duty, but martyrdom. Mademoiselle, however, loved a ball dearly, and was not ashamed to say so. She entered such gatherings, indeed, with something of the nervousness felt by a recruit in his first engagement. The prospect of triumph was enhanced by the chance of danger; but the sense of personal apprehension forcibly overcome, which is, perhaps, the true definition of courage, added elasticity to her spirits, keenness to her intellect, and even charms to her person. Beauty, moving gracefully amongst admiring glances, under a warm light, in a cloud of muslin, carries, perhaps, as high a heart beneath her bodice as beats behind the steel cuirass of Valour, riding his mailed war-horse in triumph through the shock of opposing squadrons.

"And I like going out so much, mamma," said the girl, sitting on a footstool by her chair, and leaning both elbows on her mother's lap. "With you I mean; that must, of course, be understood. Alone in a ballroom without the petticoats of madame la marquise, behind which to run when the wolf comes, I should be so frightened, I do believe I should begin to cry! Seriously, mamma, I should not like it at all. Tell me, dear mother, how did you manage at first, when you entered a society by yourself?"

"I was never afraid of the wolf," answered the marquise, laughing, "and lucky for me I was not, since the late king could not endure shy people, and if you showed the slightest symptoms of awkwardness or want of tact you were simply not asked again. But you are joking, my darling; you who need fear no criticism, with your youth, your freshness, the best dressmaker in Paris, and all that brown hair which Célandine talks of till the tears stand in her eyes."

"I hate my hair!" interrupted Cerise. "I think it's hideous! I wish it was black, like yours. A horrid man the other night at Madame's took me for an Englishwoman! He did, mamma! A Prince somebody, all over decorations. I could have run a pin into the wretch with pleasure. One of the things I like going out for is to watch my beautiful mamma, and the way to flatter me is to start back and hold up both hands, exclaiming, 'Ah! mademoiselle, none but the blind could take you for anything but the daughter of

madame la marquise!' The prince-marshal does it every time we meet. Dear old man! that is why I am so fond of him."

The young lady illustrated this frank confession by an absurd little pantomime that mimicked her veteran admirer to the life, causing her mother to laugh heartily.

"I did not know he was such a favourite," said the marquise. "You are in luck, my daughter. I expect him to pay us a visit this very evening."

Cerise made a comical little face of disgust.

"I shall go to bed before he catches me, then," she answered; "not that he is the least out of favour; on the contrary, I love him dearly; but when he has been here five minutes I yawn, in ten I shut my eyes, and long before he gets to that bridge which Monsieur de Vendôme ought, or ought not, to have blown up—there—it's no use! The thing is stronger than I am, and I go fast asleep."

"And so my little rake is disappointed," said the elder lady, taking her child's pretty head caressingly between her hands. "She would like to have a ball, or a reception, or something that would make an excuse for a sumptuous toilet, and she finds it very wearisome to sit at home, even for one night, and take care of her old mother!"

"Very!" repeated the girl playfully, while her tone made so ungracious an avowal equivalent to the fondest expression of attachment. "My old mother is so cross and so tiresome and so very *very* old. Now listen, mamma. Shall I have a dress exactly like yours for the ball at the Tuileries? The young king is to dance. I know it, for my dear prince-marshal told me so while I was still awake. I have never seen a king, only a regent, and I do think Monsieur d'Orleans so ugly. Don't tell him, mamma, but our writing-master at the convent was the image of him, and had the same wrinkles in his forehead. He used to wipe our pens in his wig, and we called him 'Pouf-Pouf'! I was the worst writer amongst all the girls, and the best arithmetician. 'Pouf-Pouf' said I had a geometrical head! Well, mamma, you must order me a dress the exact pattern of yours; the same flounces, the same trimmings, the same ribbons, and I will present myself before the prince-marshal the instant he arrives in the ballroom, to receive his accustomed compliment. Perhaps on that occasion he will take me for you! Would it not be charming? My whole ambition just now is to be exactly like my mother in every respect!"

As she finished, her eyes insensibly wandered to the

picture of the Prince de Château-Guerrand, which adorned the boudoir, but falling short of its principal figure, rested on the dead musketeer in the foreground. The marquise also happened to be looking at the same object, so that neither observed how the other's gaze was employed, nor guessed that besides figure, manner, features, voice, and gestures, there was yet a stronger point in which they bore too close and fatal a resemblance. Deep in the heart of each lurked the cherished image of a certain Grey Musketeer. The girl draping her idol, as it were, even to herself, not daring so much as to lift a corner of its veil; yet rejoicing unconsciously in its presence, and trusting with a vague but implicit faith to its protection. The woman alternately prostrating herself at its pedestal, and spurning it beneath her feet, striving, yielding, hesitating, struggling, losing ground inch by inch, and forced against her judgment, against her will, to love him with a fierce, eager, anxious love, embittered by some of the keenest elements of hate. These two hearts were formed in the same mould, were of the same blood, were knit together by the fondest and closest of ties, and one must necessarily be torn and bruised and pierced by the happiness of the other.

It was so far fortunate that neither of them knew the very precarious position in which Captain George found himself placed. Under such a ruler as the Débonnaire, it was no jesting matter for any man that his name should be written in full on a *lettre de cachet*, formally signed, sealed, and in possession of an ambitious intriguer, who, having no feelings of personal enmity to the victim, would none the less use his power without scruple or remorse. A woman was, of course, at the bottom of the scrape in which Captain George found himself; but it was also to a woman that he was indebted for timely warning of his danger. Madame de Parabére had not only intimated to him that he must make his escape without delay, but had even offered to sell her jewels that he might be furnished with the means of flight. Such marks of gratitude and generosity were none the less touching that the sacrifice proved unnecessary. A musketeer was seldom overburdened with ready money, but our captain of the Grey Company not only bore a Scottish surname, he had also a cross of Scottish blood in his veins. The first helped him to get money, the second enabled him to keep it. Monsieur Las, or Law, as he should properly have been called, like his countrymen, "kept a warm side," as he expressed it, towards anyone claiming a connection, however

remote, with his native land, and had given Captain George so many useful hints regarding the purchase and sale of Mississippi stock, that the latter, who was by no means deficient in acuteness, found himself possessed of a good round sum, in lawful notes of the realm, at the moment when such a store was absolutely necessary to his safety. He laid his plans accordingly with habitual promptitude and caution. He knew enough of these matters to think it improbable he would be publicly arrested while on guard, for in such cases profound secrecy was usually observed, as increasing the suddenness and mystery of the blow. He had, therefore, several hours to make his preparations, and the messenger whom he at once despatched to prepare relays of horses for him the whole way to the coast was several leagues on his road long before the sun went down. A valise, well-packed, containing a change of raiment, rested on the loins of his best horse, ready saddled, with pistols in holsters and bridle hanging on the stall-post, to be put on directly he was fed. Soon after dark, this trusty animal was to be led to a particular spot, not far from the Hôtel Montmirail, and there walked gently to and fro in waiting for his master. By daybreak next morning, the musketeer hoped to be half-way across Picardy.

Having made his dispositions for retreat like a true soldier, he divested his mind of further anxiety as to his own personal safety, and turned all his attention to a subject that was now seldom absent from his thoughts. It weighed on his heart like lead, to reflect how soon he must be parted from Cerise, how remote was the chance of their ever meeting again. In his life of action and adventure he had indeed learned to believe that for a brave man nothing was impossible, but he could not conceal from himself that it might be years before he could return to France, and his ignorance in what manner he could have offended the Regent only made his course the more difficult, his future the more gloomy and uncertain. On one matter he was decided. If it cost him liberty or life he would see the girl he loved once more, assure her of his unalterable affection, and so satisfy the great desire that had grown lately into a necessity of his very being. So it fell out that he was thinking of Cerise, while Cerise, with her eyes on the musketeer in the picture, was thinking of him; the marquise believing the while that her child's whole heart was fixed on her ball-dress for the coming gaieties at the Tuileries.

With the mother's thoughts we will not interfere, inas-

much as, whatever their nature, the fixed expression of her countenance denoted that she was keeping them down with a strong hand. The two had been silent longer than either of them would have allowed, when Célandine entered with a note — observing, as she presented it to her mistress, "Mademoiselle is pale; mademoiselle looks fatigued; madame takes her too much into society for one so young; she had better go to bed at once, a long sleep will bring back the colour to her cheeks."

The marquise laughed at her old servant's carefulness.

"You would like to put her to bed as you used when she was a baby. Who brought this?" she added, with a start, as, turning the note in her hand, she observed the royal arms of the bodyguard emblazoned on its seal; bending her head over it the while to conceal the crimson that rose to her very temples.

What a wild gush of happiness filled her heart while she read on—her warm wilful heart, that sent tears of sheer pleasure to her eyes so that she could scarcely decipher the words, and that beat so loud, she hardly heard Célandine's disapproving accents in reply.

"The fiercest soldier, and the ugliest I have yet set eyes on. Nine feet high at least, and the rudest manners I ever encountered, even in a musketeer!"

Cerise was no longer to be pitied for want of colour, but Célandine, though she observed the change, took no notice of it, only urging on her young lady the propriety of going immediately to bed. Meanwhile, the marquise read her note again. It was not (what letter ever was?) so enchanting on the second perusal as the first.

It ran thus:—

"MADAME,—I am distressed beyond measure to trouble a lady with a question of military discipline. I cannot sufficiently regret that my duty compels me to post a sentry in the grounds of the Hôtel Montmirail. In order that this inconvenient arrangement may interfere as little as possible with the privacy of madame, I urgently request, as the greatest favour, that she will indicate by her commands the exact spot on which she will permit one of my musketeers to be stationed, and I will be at madame's orders at the usual time of going my rounds to-night. I have the honour to remain, with assurances of the most distinguished consideration, the humblest of madame's humble servants.

"(Signed) GEORGE,
"Captain, Grey Musketeers of the King."

It was a polite document enough, and obviously the merest affair of military arrangement, yet the marquise, after a third perusal, kept it crumpled up in her hand, and when

she thought herself unobserved, hid it away, probably for security, in the bosom of her dress.

"There is no answer, Célandine," said she, with well-acted calmness, belied by the fixed crimson spot in each cheek. "My darling," she added caressingly, to her daughter, "your old *bonne* is quite right. The sooner you are in bed the better. Good-night, my child. I shall come and see you as usual after you are asleep. Ah! Cerise, how I used to miss that nightly visit when you were at the convent. You slept better without it than your mother did, I am sure!"

Then, after her daughter left the room, she moved the lamp far back into a recess, and sat down at the open window, pressing both hands against her bosom, as though to restrain the beating of her heart. How her mind projected itself into the future! What wild, inconceivable, impracticable projects she formed, destroyed, and reconstructed once more! She overleaped probability, possibility, the usages of life, the very lapse of time. At a bound she was walking with him through her woods in Touraine, his own, his very own. They had given up Paris, the Court, ambition, society, everything in the world for each other, and they were so happy! so happy! Cerise, herself, and *him*. Ah! she felt now the capabilities she had for goodness. She knew what she could be with a man like that—a man whom she could respect as well as love. She almost felt the pressure of his arm, while his kind, brave face looked down into her own, under just such a moon as that rising even now through the trees above the guard-house. Then she came back to her boudoir in the Hôtel Montmirail, and the consciousness, the triumphant consciousness that, come what might, she must at least see him and hear his voice within an hour; but recalling the masked ball at the Opera House the night before, she trembled and turned pale, thinking she would never dare to look him in the face again.

There was yet another subject of anxiety. The prince-marshal was to come, as he often did of an evening, and pass half an hour over a cup of coffee before he retired to rest. It made her angry to think of her old admirer, as if she did indeed already belong to someone else. How long that someone seemed in coming, and yet she had sat there, hot and cold by turns, for but five minutes, unless her clock had stopped.

Suddenly, with a great start, she sprang from her chair, and listened, upright, with parted lips and hair put back. No! her ear was not deceived! It had caught the clink of spurs, and a faint measured footfall, outside in the distant street.

CHAPTER XX

A GENERAL RENDEZVOUS

MEANWHILE Cerise, not the least sleepy, though sent prematurely to bed, dismissed her attendant protesting vehemently, and sat herself down also at an open window, to breathe the night air, look at the moon, and dream, wide-awake, on such subjects as arise most readily in young ladies' minds when they find themselves alone with their own thoughts in the summer evening. However exalted these may have been, they can scarcely have soared to the actual romance of which she was an unconscious heroine, or foreseen the drama of action and sentiment she was about to witness in person. Little did she imagine, while she leaned a sweet face, pale and serene in the moonlight, on an arm half hidden in the wealth of her unbound hair, that two men who could have kissed the very ground she trod on were watching every movement; for one of whom she was the type of all that seemed best and loveliest in woman, teaching him to look from earth to heaven; for the other, an angel of light, pure and holy in herself, yet luring him irresistibly down the path to hell.

The latter had been hidden since dusk, that he might but see her shadow cross the windows of the gallery, one by one, when she sought her chamber; the other was visiting his guard two hours earlier than usual, with a silent caution that seemed mistrustful of their vigilance, in order that he might offer her the heart of an honest man, ere he fled for his life to take refuge in another land.

Captain George, entering the garden through a private door, could see plainly enough the figure of Mademoiselle de Montmirail brought into relief by the lamp-light in her room. She must have heard his step in the street, he thought, for she had risen and was looking earnestly out into the darkness; but from some cause or another, at the instant the door in the garden wall closed behind him, she shrank back and disappeared. His heart beat high. Could she have expected

him? Could she know intuitively why he was there to-night? Was it possible she would run down and grant him a meeting in the garden? The thought was rapture! Yet perhaps with all its intoxication, he scarcely loved her so dearly as he had done a moment before—as he did a moment after, when he actually distinguished a white dress flitting along the terrace at the farthest corner of the building. Then indeed he forgot duty, danger, exile, uncertainty, the future, the past, everything but the intense happiness of that moment. He was conscious of the massive trees, the deep shadows, the black clusters of shrubs, the dusky outlines of the huge indistinct building traversed here and there by a broad shimmer of light, the stars above his head, the crescent moon, the faint whisper of leaves, the drowsy perfume of flowers, but only because of her presence who turned the whole to a glimpse of fairyland. He stole towards the terrace, treading softly, keeping carefully in the shadow of the trees. So intent was he, and so cautious, that he never observed Cerise return to her post of observation.

She had resumed it, however, at the very moment when the musketeer, having advanced some ten paces with the crouching stealthy gait of a Red Indian drawing on his game, stopped short—like the savage when he has gone a step too far—rigid, motionless, scarcely breathing, every faculty called up *to watch*. The attention of Mademoiselle de Montmirail was aroused at the same moment by the same cause.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that the Duke of Orleans, Regent of France, was no less ambitious of distinction in the fields of love than of war. That in the one, though falling far short of his heroic ancestor, whom he so wished to resemble, his prowess was not below the average, scandal itself must admit; but that, if experience ought to count for anything, his encounters in the other should have made him the most successful campaigner of his time, history cannot conscientiously deny. Like all such freebooters, however, he met with many a bitter reverse, many a signal defeat never mentioned in despatches. His rebuffs, we may be sure, were written on water, though his triumphs were carved in stone; and it was for those on whom he could make least impression that he cherished the greatest interest. The way to captivate the Regent was not so much to *profess*, as to *entertain* a thorough contempt for his character, an utter disregard of his position. The noble mind, the stout heart, the strong will, the sagacious, deep-thinking, yet open disposition, true type of manhood, is to be won by love; but the sensualist, the

coward, the false, the wicked, and the weak, are all best tamed by scorn. With a new face, the Regent was captivated, as a matter of course, for an hour or two; seldom during a whole day; though on occasion, if the face were very beautiful, and strictly guarded, he besieged its owner for a week; but Madame de Montmirail was the only long-established beauty of the Court who had seriously captivated his fancy, and indeed, what little was left of his miserable self-indulgent heart. This triumph she owed to her perfect unconsciousness of it, and complete disregard for her admirer, therefore it became more firmly established day by day; and when Malletort, who thoroughly comprehended the nature he wished to rule, hinted that his kinswoman was not insensible to the prince's merits, he did but blow into flame a fire that had been smouldering longer than even he was aware.

Now the abbé had sufficient confidence in her powers and her attractions to be sure that if Madame de Montmirail once obtained an acknowledged and ostensible influence over the Regent she would become the virtual ruler of France; and the abbé, in his own way, loved his cousin better than anything but the excitement of ambition and the possession of political power. He believed that her disgrace would be of infinite advantage to herself as well as to him, and thought he could see her way clearly, with his own assistance, to an eventual throne. He was a man without religion, without principle, without honour, without even the common sympathies of humanity. It is difficult in our days to conceive such a character, though they were common enough in France during the last century; but in his views for his cousin, evil as they were, he seemed at least honest—more, self-sacrificing, since she was the only creature on earth for whom he cared.

With his knowledge of her disposition, he did not conceal from himself that great difficulties attended his task. However lightly the cynical abbé might esteem a woman's virtue, his experience taught him not to underrate the obstinacy of a woman's pride. That his cousin, in common with her family, possessed an abundance of the latter quality, he was well aware, and he played his game accordingly. It was his design to compromise her by a *coup-de-main*, after he had sapped her defences to the utmost by the arguments of ambition and self-interest. Like all worldly men in their dealings with women, he undervalued both her strength and her weakness—her aversion to the Regent, and her fancy for the musketeer; this even while he made use of the latter to overcome the former sentiment. If she could be induced by

any means, however fraudulent, to grant the prince an interview at night in her own gardens, he argued, that first step would have been taken, which it is always so difficult to retract; and to bring this about, he had forged Captain George's signature to the polite note which had proved so effectual in luring the marquise down the terrace steps, and across the velvet lawn, under the irresistible temptation of a meeting by moonlight with the man she loved. As a measure of mere politeness, connected with certain military precautions, of course!

But under such circumstances it would appear that *one* musketeer ought to be company enough for *one* lady at a time. Cerise, viewing the performances from her window above, might have come to the conclusion, had she not been too anxious, agitated, terrified, to retain full possession of her faculties, that the arrival of a few more of these guardsmen on such a scene, at such a crisis, was conducive rather to tumult and bloodshed than appropriate conversation.

Captain George, stopping short in his eager though stealthy advance towards the white figure flitting noiselessly across the lawn, first thought he was dreaming; next, that he beheld a spectral or illusive image of himself, denoting near approach of death; lastly, that the discipline of the corps had become relaxed to a degree which his military indignation resolved should be severely visited within an hour, though he abandoned his command the next. A Grey Musketeer, hatted, cloaked, booted precisely like himself, was advancing from the direction of the guard-house towards the white figure, that now stopped short as if expecting him. While yet a few feet apart, both stood still, and Captain George, in dark shadow at ten paces' distance, not only recognised the marquise by her voice, but saw her face distinctly, as she turned it towards the moonlight, framed in its masses of black hair. His heart beat calmly now, and he was the cool resolute man of action once more.

She was the first to speak, and though they trembled a little, very soft and musical fell her tones on the listener's ear.

"I received monsieur's note. It was most kind and considerate on his part. I have been expecting him for this hour past."

The cloaked figure uncovered. George, watching Madame de Montmirail, observed her start and raise her head defiantly

"Madame will forgive the intrusion then," said her companion, "since it is not unexpected. She will consider also the temptation, and the discretion of her visitor."

am not going to turn my back on my aide-de-camp! I watched you from the roof of my coach over the wall. By the cross of St. Louis, I never saw so good a fight, and I have had fifty years of it, my boy. Here! take my carriage. They dare not stop *that* at their barriers. Those English horses can go like the wind: bid them carry you where you will."

George pressed his hand and whispered in his ear.

"Relays!" exclaimed the prince-marshal. "Then you are safe. Shut him in! And you, coachman, be off! Drive as if you had the devil or old Turenne in your rear!"

It was about this moment that Célandine, rushing into her young lady's room to comfort her, in the alarm, found Cerise extended, motionless and unconscious, on the floor.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FOX AND FIDDLE

THREE dirty children with blue eyes, fair locks, and round, chubby faces, deepened by a warm peach-like tint beneath the skin, such as are to be seen in plenty along our southern seaboard, were busily engaged building a grotto of shells opposite their home, at the exact spot where its construction was most in the way of pedestrians passing through the narrow ill-paved street. Their shrill cries and blooming looks denoted the salubrious influence of sea air, while their nationality was sufficiently attested by the vigour with which the eldest, a young lady less than ten years of age, called out "Frenchie! Frenchie! Froggie! Froggie!" after a foreign-looking man with a pale face and dark eyes, who stepped over the low half-door that restrained her infant brothers and sisters from rolling out into the gutter, as if he was habitually a resident in the house. He appeared, indeed, a favourite with the children, for while they recalled him to assist their labours, which he did with a good-nature and address peculiarly winning to architects of that age, they chanted in his praise, and obviously with the intention of doing him high honour, a ditty of no particular tune, detailing the matrimonial adventures of an amphibious animal, supposed at that time to bear close affinity to all Frenchmen, as related with a remarkable chorus by one Anthony Rowley; and the obliging foreigner, suspecting neither sarcasm nor insult, but only suffering torture from an utter absence of tune, hummed lustily in accompaniment.

Over the heads of these urchins hung their paternal sign-board, creaking and swinging in the breeze now freshening with an incoming tide. Its representation of a fox playing the

fiddle was familiar to seafaring men as indicating a favourite house of call for the consumption of beer, tobacco, and that seductive compound known to several generations by the popular name of punch.

The cheerful fire, the red curtains, the sanded floor, the wooden chairs, and liberal measures of their jovial haunt, had been present to the mind's eye of many an honest tar clinging wet and cold to a slippery yard, reefing topsails in a nor'-wester, or eating maggoty biscuit and sipping six-water grog, on half rations, homeward bound with a head-wind, but probably none of them had ever speculated on the origin of the sign they knew so well and thought of so often. Why a fox and fiddle should be found together in a seaport town, what a fox had to do with a fiddle, or, however appropriate to their ideas of jollity the instrument might appear, wherefore its player should be represented as the cunning animal whom destiny had already condemned to be hunted by English country gentlemen, was a speculation on which they had no wish to embark. Neither have I. It is enough to know that the Fox and Fiddle sold loaded beer, strong tobacco, and scalding punch, to an extent not even limited by the consumer's purse; for when Jack had spent all his *rhino*, the landlord's liberality enabled him to run up a score, hereafter to be liquidated from the wages of a future voyage. The infatuated debtor, paying something like two hundred per cent. on every mouthful for this accommodation, by a farther arrangement, that he should engage with any skipper of the landlord's providing, literally sold himself, body and soul, for a nipperkin of rum and half a pound of tobacco. Nevertheless, several score of the boldest hearts and readiest hands in England were to be bought at this low price, and Butter-faced Bob, as his rough-spoken customers called the owner of the Fox and Fiddle, would furnish as many of them at a reasonable tariff, merchant and man-of-war's men, as the captain wanted or the owners could afford to buy. It was no wonder his children had strong lungs, and round, well-fed cheeks.

"That's a good chap!" observed a deep hoarse voice, which made the youngest grotto-builder start and shrink behind its sister, while a broad elderly figure rolled and lurched after the obliging foreigner into the house. It would have been as impossible to mistake the new-comer for a landsman as Butter-faced Bob himself for anything but a publican. His gait on the pavement was that of one who had so thoroughly got his sea-legs, that he was, to the last degree, incommoded by the uneven though stable surface

of the shore; and while he trod the passage, as being planked, with more confidence, he nevertheless ran his hand, like a blind man, along tables and other articles of furniture while he passed them, seeming, in every gesture, to be more ready with his arms than his legs. Broad-faced, broad-shouldered, broad-handed, he looked a powerful, and at the same time a strong-constitutioned man, but grizzled hair and shaggy eyebrows denoted he was past his prime; while a reddened neck and tanned face, with innumerable little wrinkles round the eyes, suggested constant watchfulness and exposure in hard weather afloat, no less than swollen features and marked lines told of deep drinking and riotous living ashore.

The seamen of that period, though possessing an undoubted claim to the title, were far more than to-day a class distinct and apart from their fellow-countrymen. The standing army, an institution of which our parliaments had for generations shown themselves so jealous, could boast, indeed, a consolidation and discipline under Marlborough which made them, as the musketeers of the French king allowed, second to no troops in Europe. But their triumphs, their organisation, even their existence, was comparatively of recent date. The navy, on the other hand, had been a recognised and constitutional force for more than a century, and had enjoyed, from the dispersion of the Spanish Armada downwards, a series of successes almost uninterrupted. It is true that the cannonade of a Dutch fleet had been heard in the Thames, but few of the lowest seamen were so ignorant as to attribute this national disgrace to want of courage in their officers or incapacity in themselves. Their leaders, indeed, were usually more remarkable for valour than discretion, nor was this surprising under the system by which captains were appointed to their ships. A regiment and a three-decker were considered by the Government equivalent and convertible commands. The cavalry officer of to-day might find himself directing the manœuvres of a fleet to-morrow. The relics of so untoward an arrangement may be detected in certain technical phrases not yet out of use. The word "squadron" is even now applied alike to a handful of horse and a powerful fleet, numbering perhaps a dozen sail of the line. Raleigh, himself, began his fighting career as a soldier, and Rupert finished his as a sailor.

With such want of seamanship, therefore, amongst its commanders, our navy must have possessed in its construction some great preponderating influence to account for its efficiency. This compensating power was to be found in its

masters, its petty-officers, and its seamen. The last were thoroughly impregnated with the briny element on which they passed their lives. They boasted themselves a race apart. "Land-lubber" was for them a term conveying the utmost amount of derision and contempt. To be an "old salt" was the ideal perfection at which alone it was worth while for humanity to aim. The seaman, exulting in his profession, was never more a seaman than when rolling about on shore, swearing strange oaths, using nautical phrases, consuming vast quantities of beer and tobacco, above all, flinging his money here and there with a profuse and injudicious liberality especially distinctive of his kind.

The popularity of such characters amongst the lower classes may be readily imagined; for, with the uneducated and unreflecting, a reckless bearing very generally passes for courage; a tendency to dissipation for manliness; and a boastful expenditure for true generosity of heart. Perhaps, to the erroneous impressions thus disseminated amongst the young, should be attributed the inclination shown towards a service of which the duties entailed continual danger, excessive hardship, and daily privation. Certainly at a period when the worst provision was made, both physical and moral, for the welfare of men before the mast, there never seems to have been found a difficulty in keeping up the full complement of the British navy.

They were, indeed, a race apart, not only in their manners, their habits, their quaint expressions, their simple modes of thought, but in their superstitions and even their religious belief. They cultivated a rough, honest kind of piety, well illustrated in later years by Dibdin, himself a landsman, when he sang of

> "The sweet little cherub that sits up aloft
> To take care of the life of poor Jack."

But it was overloaded and interspersed with a thousand strange fancies not more incongruous than unreasonable and far-fetched.

No power would induce them to clear out of port, or, indeed, commence any important undertaking on a Friday. Mother Carey's chickens were implicitly believed to be messengers sent express from another world to warn the mariner of impending storm, and bid him shorten sail ere it began to blow. Carlmilhan, the famous pirate, who, rather than be taken alive, had in default of gunpowder scuttled his

own ship and gone down with it, all standing, was still to be heard giving notice in deep unearthly tones from under her very keel when the ship approached shoal water, shifting sands, or treacherous coral-reefs in the glittering seas beneath the tropics. That phantom Dutchman, who had been provoked by baffling winds about the Cape to speak "unadvisedly with his lips," was still to be seen in those tempestuous latitudes careering through the storm-drift under a press of sail, when the best craft that swam hardly dared show a stitch of canvas. The speaking-trumpet was still to be heard from her deck, shouting her captain's despairing request to take his letters home, and the magic ship still disappeared at half a cable's length and melted into air, while the wind blew fiercer and the sea rose higher, and sheets of rain came flashing down from the black squall lowering overhead.

Nor was it only in the wonders of this world that the tar professed his unaccountable belief. His credulity ran riot in regions beyond the grave, or, to use his own words, after he had "gone to Davy Jones." A mystical spot which he called Fiddler's Green was for him both the Tartarus and Elysium of the ancients—a land flowing, not indeed with milk and honey, but with rum and limejuice; a land of perpetual music, mirth, dancing, drinking, and tobacco; a land in which his weary soul was to find an intervening spell of enjoyment and repose, ere she put out again for her final voyage into eternity.

In the meantime, the new arrival at the Fox and Fiddle, seating himself at a small table in the public room, or tap as it would now be called, ordered a quart of ale and half a pint of rum. These fluids he mingled with great care, and sipped his beverage in a succession of liberal mouthfuls, dwelling on each with an approving smack, as a man drinks a good bottle of claret. Butter-faced Bob, who waited on him, remarked that he pulled out but one gold piece in payment, and knowing the ways of his patrons, concluded it was his last, or he would have selected it from a handful. The landlord remembered he had a customer in the parlour who wanted just such articles as this burly, broad-shouldered seaman, with pockets at low water.

The man did not, however, count his change when it was brought him, but shovelled it into his sealskin tobacco-pouch, a coin or two short, without looking at it. He then filled carefully, drank, and pondered with an air of grave and imposing reflection. Long before his measure was finished a second guest entered the taproom, whose manners, gait,

and gestures were an exact counterpart of the first. He was taller, however, and thinner, altogether less robust and prosperous-looking, showing a sallow face and withered skin, that denoted he had spent much of his life in hot climates. Though he looked younger than the other, his bearing was more staid and solemn, nor did he at once vociferate for something to drink. Beer seemed his weakness less than 'baccy, for he placed a small copper coin on a box ingeniously constructed, so that, opening only by such means, it produced exactly the money's worth of the fragrant weed, and loading a pipe with a much-tatooed hand, proceeded to puff volumes of smoke through the apartment.

Butter-faced Bob, entering, cheerfully proffered all kinds of liquids as a matter of course, but was received with surly negatives, and retired to speculate on the extreme of wealth or poverty denoted by this abstinence. A man, he thought, to be proof against such temptations must be either so rich, and consequently so full of liquor that he was unable to drink any more, or so poor that he couldn't afford to be thirsty.

So the last comer smoked in silence at a little table of his own, which he had drawn into a corner, and his predecessor drank at *his* table, looking wiser and wiser, while each glanced furtively at the other without opening his lips. Presently the eyes of the elder man twinkled: he had got an idea—nay, he actually launched it. Filling his glass, and politely handing it to the smoker, but reserving the jug to drink from himself, he proposed the following comprehensive toast—

"All ships at sea!"

They both drank it gravely and without further comment. It was a social challenge, and felt to be such; the smoker pondered, put out the glass he had drained to be refilled, and holding it on a level with his eyes, enunciated solemnly—

"All ships in port!"

When equal justice had been done to this kindred sentiment, and the navies of the world were thus exhausted, they came to a dead-lock and relapsed into silence once more.

This calm might have remained unbroken for a considerable time but for the entrance of a third seaman, much younger than either of the former, whose appearance in the passage had been received by a round of applause from the children, a hearty greeting from the landlady—though that portly woman, with her handsome face, would not have left

her arm-chair to welcome an admiral—and a "good-morrow," louder, but not more sincere, from Bob himself. It appeared that this guest was well known and also trusted at the Fox and Fiddle, for, entering the public room with a sea-bow and a scrape of his foot on its sanded floor, he called lustily for a quart of strong ale and a pipe, while he produced an empty purse, and shook it in the landlord's face with a laugh of derision that would have become the wealthiest nobleman in Great Britain.

"Ay, lad," said Bob, shaking his head, but setting before his customer the beer and tobacco as desired. "'Tis well enough to begin a fresh score when the old one's wiped out; but I saw that purse, with my own eyes, half full of broad pieces at the ebb. See now; you've gone and cleared it out —not a blessed groat left—and it's scarce high-water yet!"

"What o' that, old shiney?" laughed the other. "Isn't there plenty more to be yarned when them's all gone? Slack water be hanged! I tell you I'll have a doubloon for every one of these here raindrops afore a month's out. I know where they grows, old man; I know where they grows. My sarvice to ye, mates! Here's 'Outward bound and an even keel!'"

While he spoke he whirled the raindrops off his shining hat upon the floor, and nodding to the others, took a long pull at his ale, which nearly emptied the jug; then he filled a pipe, winked at the retiring landlord, and smoked in silence. The others scanned him attentively. He was an active, well-built young fellow of two or three and twenty, with foretopman written on every feature of his reckless, saucy, good-looking face—in every gesture of his wiry, loose, athletic limbs. He was very good-looking; his eyes sparkled with fun and his teeth were as white as a lady's; his hair too might have been the envy of many a woman, clustering as it did in a profusion of curls over a pair of real gold earrings—a fashion now beginning to find considerable favour amongst the rising generation of seamen, though regarded with horror by their seniors as a new and monstrous affectation, proving, if indeed proof were needed for so self-evident a fact, that, as in all previous and subsequent ages, "the service was going to the devil."

Even his joviality, however, seemed damped by the taciturnity of his comrades. He too smoked in silence and gave himself up to meditation. The rain pattered outside, and gusts of wind dashed it fitfully against the window-pane. The tide moaned sullenly, and a house-dog, chained in the

backyard, lifted up his voice to howl in unison. The three seamen smoked and drank and brooded, each occasionally removing his pipe from his mouth as if about to break the silence, on which the others looked in his face expectant, and for a time this was the whole extent of the conversation.

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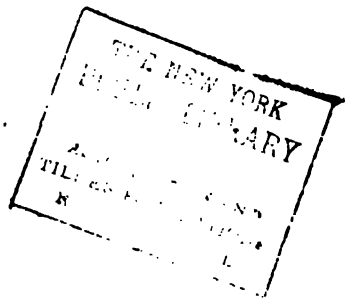
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CHAPTER XXII

THREE STRANDS OF A YARN

AS in a council of war, the youngest spoke first.

"Mates!" said he, "here be three of us, all run for the same port, and never a one sported bunting. I ain't a chap, I ain't, as must be brought to afore he'll show his number. When I drinks with a man I likes to fit his name on him shipshape, so here's my sarvice to you messmates both! They calls me Slap-Jack. That's about what they calls *me* both ashore and afloat."

It was absolutely necessary after such an exordium that more liquor should be brought in, and a generous contention immediately arose between the three occupants of the tap-room as to who should pay for it; at once producing increased familiarity, besides a display of liberality on the part of the eldest and first comer, who was indeed the only one possessing ready money. Butter-faced Bob being summoned, the jugs were replenished and Slap-Jack continued his remarks.

"I've been cruising about ashore," said he, between the whiffs of his pipe, "and very bad weather I made on it standing out over them Downs, as they calls 'em, in these here latitudes. Downs, says I, the Downs is mostly smooth water and safe anchorage; but these here Ups and Downs is a long leg and a short one, a head wind and an ebb tide all the voyage through. I made my port though, d'ye mind me, my sons, at last, and—and—well, we've all had our sweethearts in our day, so we'll drink her health by your leave. Here's to Alice, mates! and next round it shall be *your* call, and thank ye hearty."

So gallant a toast could not but be graciously accepted. The second comer, however, shook his head while he did it justice, and drank, so to speak, under protest, thereby in no measure abating the narrator's enthusiasm.

"She's a trim-built craft is my Alice," continued the other reflectively. "On a wind or off a wind, going large or close hauled, moored in dock or standing out in blue water, there's

not many of 'em can show alongside of she. And she's weatherly besides, uncommon weatherly she is. When I bids her good-bye at last, and gives her a bit of a squeeze, just for a reminder like, she wipes her eyes, and she smiles up in my face, and 'God bless you, Jack!' says she; 'you won't forget me,' says she; 'an' you'll think of me sometimes, when it's your watch on deck; and as for me, Jack, I'll think of you every hour of the day and night till you comes back again; it won't be so very long first.' She's heart of oak, is that lass, mates, and I wouldn't be here now but that I'm about high and dry, and that made me feel a bit lubberly, d'ye see, till I got under weigh for the homeward trip; an' you'll never guess what it was as raised my spirits, beating to windward across them Downs, with a dry mouth and my heart shrunk up to the size of a pea."

"A stiff glass of grog nor'-nor'-west?" suggested the oldest sailor, with a grunt. "Another craft on the same lines, with new sails bent and a lick of fresh paint on," snarled the second, whose opinion of the fair sex, derived chiefly from seaport towns, was none of the highest.

"Neither one nor t'other," replied Slap-Jack triumphantly. "Scalding punch wouldn't have warmed my heart up just then, and I wasn't a-goin' to clear out from Alice like that, and give chase to a fresh sail just because she cut a feather across my fore-foot. It was neither more nor less than a chap swinging in chains; a chap as had been swinging to all appearance so long he must have got used to it, though I doubt he was very wet up there in nothing but his bones. He might have been a good-looking blade enough when he began, but I can't say much for his figure-head when I passed under it for luck. It wanted painting, mates, let alone varnish, and he grinned awful in the teeth of the wind. So I strikes my topmast as I forges ahead, and I makes him a low bow, and, says I, 'Thank ye kindly, mate,' says I, 'for putting it in my mind,' says I; 'you've been "on the account," in all likelihood, and that's where I'll go myself next trip, see if I won't;' and I ask your pardon, my sons, for you're both older men than me by a good spell, if that isn't the trade for a lad as looks to a short voyage and good wages, every man for himself, grab what you see, an' keep all you can?"

Thus appealed to, the elder seaman felt bound to give an opinion; so he cleared his throat and asked huskily—

"Have you *tried* it, mate? You seems like a lad as has dipped both hands in the tar-bucket, though you be but young and sarcy. Look ye, now, you hoisted signals first,

an' I ain't a-going to show a false ensign, I ain't. You may call me Bottle-Jack; you won't be the first by a many, and I ain't ashamed o' my name."

The next in seniority then removed the pipe from his lips, and smiting the table with a heavy fist, observed sententiously—

"And me, Smoke-Jack, young man. It's a rum name, ain't it, for as smart a foretopman as ever lay out upon a yard? but I've yarned it, that's what I sticks to. I've yarned it. Here's your health, lad; I wish ye well."

The three having thus gone through all the forms necessary to induce a long and staunch friendship amongst men of their class, Slap-Jack made a clean breast of it, as if he had known his companions for years.

"I *have* tried it, mates," said he; "and a queer game it is; but I don't care how soon I try it again. I suppose I must have been born a landsman somehow, d'ye see? though I can't make much of that when I come to think it over. It don't seem nat'ral like, but I suppose it was so. Well, I remember as I runned away from a old bloke wot wanted to make me a sawbones—a sawbones! and I took and shipped myself, like a young bear, aboard of the *Sea Swallow*, cabin-boy to Captain Delaval. None o' your merchantmen was the *Sea Swallow*, nor yet a man-o'-war, though she carried a royal ensign at the gaff, and six brass carronades on the main-deck. She was a waspish craft as ever you'd wish to see, an' dipped her nose in it as though she loved the taste of blue water, the jade!—wet, but weatherly, an' such a picture as you never set eyes on, close-hauled within five points of the wind. First they gammoned me as she was a slaver, and then a sugar-merchant's pleasure-boat, and sometimes they said she was a privateer, with letters of marque from the king; but I didn't want to know much about that; King George or King Louis, it made no odds, bless ye; I warn't a-goin' to turn sawbones, an' Captain Delaval was *my* master, that was enough for me! Such a master he was, too! No seaman—not he. His hands were as white as a lady's, an' I doubt if he knew truck from taffrail; but with old Blowhard, the master, to sail her, and do what the skipper called swabbing and dirty work, there wasn't a king's officer as ever I've heard of could touch him. Such a man to fight his ship was Captain Delaval. I've seen him run her in under a Spanish battery, with a table set on deck and a awning spread, and him sitting with a glass of wine in his hand, and give his orders as cool and comfortable as you and me is

now. 'Easy, Blowhard!' he'd sing out, when old 'Blow' was sweating, and cursing, and stamping about to get the duty done. 'Don't ye speak so sharp to the men,' says he; 'spoils their ear for music,' says he. 'We'll be out o' this again afore the breeze falls, and we'll turn the fiddles up and have a dance in the cool of the evening.' Then he'd smile at me, and say, 'Slap-Jack, you little blackguard, run below for another pineapple; not so rotten-ripe as the last;' and by the time I was on deck again, he'd be wiping his sword carefully, and drawing on his gloves—that man couldn't so much as whistle a hornpipe without his gloves; and let who would be *second* on board the prize, be she barque, schooner, brig, galleon, or square-rigged ship, Captain Delaval he would be *first*. Look ye here, mates: I made two voyages with Captain Delaval, and when I stepped on the quay at Bristol off the second—there! I was worth a hundred doubloons, all in gold, besides as much silk as would have lined the foresail, and a pair of diamond earrings that I lost the first night I slept ashore. I thought, then, as perhaps I wasn't to see my dandy skipper again, but I was wrong. I've never been in London town but once, an' I don't care if I never goes no more. First man I runs against in Thames Street is Captain Delaval, ridin' in a cart with his hands tied; and old Blowhard beside him, smelling at a nosegay as big as the binnacle. I don't think as old 'Blow' knowed me again, not in long togs; but the skipper he smiles, and shows his beautiful white teeth as he was never tired of swabbing and holystoning, and 'There's Slap-Jack!' says he; 'Good-bye, Slap-Jack; I'll be first man over the gunwale in this here scrimmage, too,' says he, 'for they'll hang me first, and then Blowhard, when he's done with his nosegay.' I wish I could find such another skipper now; what say ye, mates?"

Smoke-Jack, who was sitting next him, did not immediately reply. He was obviously of a logical and argumentative turn of mind, with a cavilling disposition, somewhat inclined to speculative philosophy; such a character, in short, as naval officers protest against under the title of a lawyer. He turned the matter over deliberately ere he replied, with a voluminous puff of smoke between each sentence—

"Some likes a barky, and some wouldn't touch a rope in any craft but a schooner; and there's others, again, swears a king's cutter will show her heels to the liveliest of 'em, with a stiffish breeze and a bobble of sea on. I ain't a-goin' to dispute it. Square-rigged, or fore-and-aft, if so be she's well-found and answers her helm, I ain't a-goin' to say but what

she'll make good weather of it the whole voyage through. Men thinks different, young chap; that's where it is. Now you asks me my opinion, and I'll give it you, free. I'm a old man-of-war's man, I am. I've eat the king's biscuit and drank the king's allowance ever since I were able to eat and drink at all. Now I'll tell you, young man, a-cause you've asked me, free. The king's sarvice is a good sarvice; I ain't a-goin' to say as it isn't, but for two things: there's too much of one, and too little of the other. The fust is the work, and the second is the pay. If they'd halve the duty, and double the allowance, and send all the officers before the mast, I ain't goin' to dispute but the king's sarvice would be more to my fancy than I've ever found it yet. You see the difference atwixt one of our lads when he gits ashore and the Dutch! I won't say as the Dutchman is the better seaman, far from it; though as long as he's got a plank as'll catch a nail, an' a rag as'll hold a breeze, he'll weather it somehow; nor I won't say but what Mynheer is as ugly a customer as a king's ship can get alongside of, yardarm to yardarm, and let the best man win! But you see him ashore! Spree, young man? Why, a Dutchman *never* has his spree out! You take and hail a man before the mast, able seaman or what not, when he's paid off of a cruise—and mind ye, he doesn't engage for a long spell, doesn't Mynheer—and he'll tow you into dry dock, and set you down to your grub, and blow you out with *schnaps* as if he was a admiral. Such a berth as he keeps ashore! Pots and pans as bright as the Eddystone; deck scoured and holystoned, till you'd like to eat your rations off of it. Why, Black Sam, him as was boatswain's mate on board of the *Mary Rose*, sitting with me in the tap of the Golden Lion, at Amsterdam, he gets uneasy, and he looks here and there an' everywhere, first at the white floor, then at the bright stove, turning his quid about and about, till at last he ups and spits right in the landlord's face. There *was* a breeze then! I'm not a-goin' to deny it, but Sam he asks pardon quite gentle and humble-like, 'for what could I do?' says he; 'it was the only dirty place I could find in the house,' says he. Young chap, I'm not a-goin' to say as you should take and ship yourself on board a Dutchman; 'cause why—maybe if he struck his colours and you was found atween decks, you'd swing at the yardarm; but if you be thinking of the king's sarvice, and you asks my advice, says I, think about it a little longer, says I. Young chap, I gives you my opinion, free. What say you, messmate? Bear a hand and lower away, for I've been payin' of it out till my mouth's dry."

Bottle-Jack, who did not give his mouth a chance of becoming dry, took a long pull at the beer before he answered; but as his style was somewhat involved, and obscured besides by the free use of professional metaphors, applied in a sense none but himself could thoroughly appreciate, I will not venture to detail in his own words the copious and illustrative exposition on which he embarked. It was obvious, however, that Bottle-Jack's inclinations were adverse to the regular service, and although he would have scouted such a notion, and probably made himself extremely disagreeable to the man who broached it, there was no question the old sailor had been a pirate, and deserved hanging as richly as any ghastly skeleton now bleaching in its chains and waving to the gusts of a sou'-wester on the exposed sky-line of the Downs. By his own account he had sailed with the notorious Captain Kidd, in the *Adventure* galley, originally fitted out by merchants and traders of London as a scourge for those sea-robbers who infested the Indian Ocean, and whose enormities made honest men shudder at their bare recital. The *Adventure*, manned by some of the most audacious spirits to be procured from the banks of the Thames and the Hudson, seemed, like her stout commander, especially qualified for such a purpose. She carried heavy guns, was well found in every respect, and possessed the reputation of a fast sailer and capital sea-boat. Kidd himself was an experienced officer, and had served with distinction. He was intimately acquainted with the Eastern seas, and seemed in all respects adapted for an expedition in which coolness, daring, and unswerving honesty of purpose were indispensable qualifications.

Accordingly, Captain Kidd sailed for the Indian coast, and Bottle-Jack, by his own account, was boatswain's mate on board the *Adventure*.

There is an old proverb, recommending the selection of a thief to catch a thief, which in this instance received a new and singular interpretation. Kidd was probably a thief, or at least a pirate, at heart. No sooner had he reached his destination off the coast of Malabar, than he threw off his sheep's clothing, and appeared at once the master-wolf in the predatory pack he was sent to destroy. Probably the temptation proved too much for him. With his seamanship, his weight of metal, and his crew, he could outsail, out-manœuvre, and out-fight friends and foes alike. It soon occurred to him that the former were easy and lucrative prizes, the latter, bad to capture, and often not worth the trouble when subdued. It was quicker work to gain posses-

sion at first hand of silk and spices, cinnamon and sandal-wood, gold, silver, rum, coffee, and tobacco, than to wait till the plunder had been actually seized by another, and then, after fighting hard to retake it, obtain but a jackal's share from the Home Government. In a short space of time there was but one pirate dreaded from the Cape of Good Hope to the Straits of Malacca, and his name was Kidd.

From Surat down to the mouth of the Tap-tee, Captain Kidd ruled like a petty sovereign; Bottle-Jack, if he was to be believed, like a grand vizier. Not only did they take tax and toll from every craft that swam, but they robbed, murdered, and lorded it as unmercifully on dry land. Native merchants, even men of rank and position, were put to torture, for purposes of extortion, by day; peasants burned alive in their huts to illuminate a seaman's frolic by night. Her crew behaved like devils broke loose ashore, and the *Adventure*, notwithstanding a certain discipline exacted by her commander, was, doubtless, a hell afloat. Money, however, came in rapidly. Kidd, with all his crimes, possessed the elements of success in method, organisation, and power of command. His sailors forgot the horrors they had inflicted and their own degradation when they counted the pile of doubloons that constituted their share of plunder. Amongst the swarm of rovers who then swept the seas, Captain Kidd was considered the most successful, and even in a certain sense, notwithstanding his enormities, the most *respectable* of all.

Bottle-Jack did not appear to think the relation of his adventures in any way derogatory to his own credit. He concluded with the following peroration, establishing his position in the confident tone of a man who is himself convinced of its justice:—

"Wot I says, is this here. The sea was made for them as sails upon it, and you ain't a-goin' to tell me as it can be portioned out into gardens an' orchards, and tobacco plantations, like the dirt we calls land. Werry well, if the sea be free, them as sails upon it can make free with wot it offers them. If in case now, as I'm lookout-man, we'll say, in the maintop, and I makes a galleon of her, for instance, deep in the water, under easy sail, you're not to tell me as because she shows Spanish colours I'm not to take what I want out of her. Stow that, mates, for it's clean nonsense! The way old Kidd acted was this here—First, he got her weather-gage; then he brought her to with a gun, civil and reasonable; arter that, whether she showed fight, or whether she showed friendly, he boarded her, and when he'd taken all he wanted, captain,

crew, and passengers just walked the plank, easy and quiet, and no words about it."

"And the craft?" asked Slap-Jack, breathless with interest in the old pirate's reminiscences.

"Scuttled her!" answered the other conclusively. "Talking's dry work. Let's have some more beer."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PARLOUR-LODGER

THERE was a tolerably snug parlour under the roof of the Fox and Fiddle, notwithstanding that its dimensions were small, its floor uneven, and its ceiling so low that a solitary inmate could not but feel enlivened by the company of the landlord's family, who inhabited the rooms overhead. This apartment, which was usually occupied by some skipper from beyond seas, put forward certain claims to magnificence as well as comfort; and although the vaguest attempts at cleanliness seemed to have been suppressed, there was no little pretension apparent in the furniture, the chimney ornaments, and the history of the Prodigal Son on the walls. China shepherdesses stood on the mantelpiece, surmounted by the backbone of a shark. Two gilt chairs, with frayed velvet cushions, supported an unframed representation of a three-decker, with every available sail set, and British colours flying at the main, stemming a grass-green sea, under a sky of intense blue. A contracted square of real Turkey carpet covered a few feet in the middle, and the rest of the floor, ornamented at regular intervals by spittoons, stood inch-deep in dust. The hearth could not have been swept for days, nor the smouldering fire raked out for hours; but on a mahogany sideboard, that had obviously sustained at least one sea-voyage, stood a dozen different drinking-measures, surrounding a punch-bowl capacious enough to have baptized a full-grown pirate.

The occupant of this chamber was sitting at the table engrossed by a task that seemed to tax all his energies and employ his whole attention. He was apparently no adept at accounts, and every time he added a column afresh, and found its result differed from his previous calculation, he swore a French oath in a whisper and began again. It was nearly dusk before the landlord came in with candles, when his guest looked up, as if much relieved at a temporary interruption of work. Butter-faced Bob was a plausible fellow enough, well-fitted for the situation he filled, crimp,

publican, free-trader, and, on occasion, receiver of stolen goods. From the seaman in the tap, to the skipper in the parlour, he prided himself on his facility in making conversation to his customers, saying the right thing to each; or, as he expressed it, "oiling the gear so as the crank should work easy." Setting down the candles, therefore, he proceeded to lubrication without delay.

"Sorry shall we be to lose ye, captain! and indeed it will drive me out of the public line at last, to see the way as the best o' friends must part. My dame, she says to me, it was but this blessed day as I set down to my nooning, says she, Bob, says she, whatever we shall do when the captain's gone foreign, says she, I, for one, can't tell no more than the dead. You step round to the quay, says she, when you've a-taken a drink, and see if the *Bashful Maid* ha'n't histed her blue-Peter at the fore, and the captain he'll make a fair wind o' this here sou'-wester, see if he won't, and maybe weigh at the ebb; an' it'll break my heart, let alone the chil'en's, to wish him a good voyage, it will. She's about ready for sea, captain, now; I see them gettin' the fresh water aboard myself."

The captain, as his host called him, smiled good-humouredly.

"Your dame will have many a better lodger than I have been, Bob," said he, fixing his bold eyes on the landlord, which the latter, who never seemed comfortable under an honest man's gaze, avoided by peering into every corner of the room; "one that will stay longer with you, and entertain more friends than I have done. What of that? The heaviest purse makes the best lodger, and the highest score the merriest landlord, at every hostelry in Europe. Well, I shall be ready for sea now, when I've got my complement; but I'm not going to cruise in the"—here the speaker stopped short and corrected himself—"not going to cruise *anywhere*, short-handed."

Bob's eyes glistened, and he stole a look in the captain's face.

"How many would you be wanting?" said he cautiously, "and where would they have to serve? First-class men is very bad to get here-away, just now."

"If I had a gunner, a boatswain's mate, and a good captain of the foretop, I'd weigh next tide, and chance it," replied the other cheerfully, but his chin fell while his eye rested on the pile of accounts, and he wondered how he could ever comb them into shape for inspection.

Bob thought of the seamen still drinking in his taproom,

and the obviously low state of their finances. It would work, he decided, but it must be done under three influences, namely, beer, secrecy, and caution.

"Captain," said he, shutting the door carefully, "I'd rather do you a turn than any lodger I've had yet. If I can help you to a hand or two, I'm the man as'll do it. You'll be willing to pay the expenses, I suppose?"

The captain did not appear totally inexperienced in such matters, for, on asking the amount and receiving for answer a sum that would have purchased all the stock of liquors in the house over and over again, he showed neither indignation nor surprise, but observed quietly—

"Able seamen, of course?"

"Of course!" repeated Bob. "Honour, you know, captain, honour!" If he had added "among thieves," he would none the less clearly have expressed the situation. Reflecting for a moment, he approached his guest and whispered in his ear, "For the account?"

"Ask me no questions," answered the captain significantly. "You know as well as I do that your price covers everything. Is it a bargain?"

"That would make a difference, you see, captain," urged Bob, determined to get all he could. "It's not what it used to be, and the Government is uncommon hard upon a look-out-man now, if he makes a mistake in the colours of a prize. In King James's time, I've seen the gentlemen-rovers drinking at this very table with the mayor and the magistrates, ay, and sending up their compliments and whatnot, maybe, to the lord-lieutenant himself. Why, that very mug as you see there was given me by poor Captain Delaval; quite the gentleman he was! An' he made no secret where he took it from, nor how they cut the Portuguese chap's throat as was drinking from it in the after-cabin. And now, it's as likely as not the Whigs would hang a man in chains for such a thing. I tell you, captain, the hands don't fancy it. They can't cruise a mile along-shore without running foul of a gibbet with a pi—I mean, with a skeleton on it, rattling and grinning as if he was alive. It makes a difference, captain—it makes a difference!"

"Take it or leave it," replied the other, looking like a man who had made his highest bid, which no consideration would induce him to increase by a shilling.

Bob evidently thought so. "A bargain be it," said he, with a villainous smile on his shining face; and muttering something about his wish to oblige a customer and the high

respect he entertained for his guest's character, in all its relations, public, private, and nautical, he shambled out of the room, leaving the said guest to tackle once more with his accounts.

A shade of melancholy crossed the captain's brow, deeper and darker than was to be attributed to the unwelcome nature of his employment or the sombre surroundings of his position. The light of two tallow-candles, by which he worked, was not indeed enlivening, bringing into indistinct relief the unsightly furniture and the gloomy pictures on the walls. The yard-dog, too, behind the house, had not entirely discontinued his lamentations, and the dip and wash of a retiring tide upon the shingle no farther off than the end of the street was like the voice from some unearthly mourner in its solemn and continuous wail. It told of lonely nights far out on the wild dark sea; of long shifting miles of surf thundering in pitiless succession on the ocean shore; of mighty cliffs and slabs of dripping rock, flinging back their defiance to the gale in the spray of countless hungry, leaping waves, that toss and madden round their prey ere she breaks up and goes to pieces in the storm. More than all, it told of desolation, and doubt, and danger, and death, and the uncertainty beyond.

But to him, sitting there between the candles, his head bent over his work, it seemed like the voice of a counsellor and a friend. Each wave that, fuller than ordinary, circled up with a fiercer lash, to ebb with a louder, angrier, and more protracted hiss, seemed to brighten the man's face, and he listened like a prisoner who knows the step that leads him out to life, and liberty, and love. At such times he would glance round the room, congratulating himself that his charts, his instruments, his telescope, were all safe on board, and, perhaps, would rise, take a turn or two, and open the window-shutter for a consoling look at a certain bright speck in the surrounding darkness, which might be either in earth, or sea, or air, and was indeed the anchor-light in the foretop of his ship. Then he would return, refreshed and comforted, to his accounts.

He was beginning to hope he had really got the better of these, and had so far succeeded that two consecutive columns permitted themselves to be added up with an appearance of probability, when an unusually long-drawn howl from the house-dog, following the squeak of a fiddle, distracted him from his occupation, and provoked him to swear once more in a foreign tongue. It was difficult to make calculations, involving a thousand probabilities, with that miserable dog

howling at regular intervals. It was impossible to speculate calmly on the value of his cargo, the quantity of his powder, and the chances of peace and war. While he sat there, he knew well enough that his letters of marque would bear him out in pouncing on any unfortunate merchantman he could come across under Spanish colours, but there had been whispers of peace in London, and the weekly news-letter (substitute for our daily paper), read aloud that afternoon in the coffee-house round the corner, indorsed the probability of these rumours. By the time he reached his cruising-ground, the treaty might have been signed which would change a privateer into a pirate, and the exploit that would earn a man his knighthood this week might swing him at his own yardarm the next. In those times, however, considerable latitude, if not allowed, was at least claimed by these kindred professions, and the calculator in the parlour of the Fox and Fiddle seemed unlikely to be over-scrupulous in the means by which he hoped to attain his end.

He had resolved on earning, or winning, or taking, such a sum of money as would render him independent of fortune for life. He had an object in this which he deemed worthy of any sacrifice he could offer. Therefore he had fitted out and freighted his brigantine partly at his own expense, partly at that of certain confiding merchants in Leadenhall Street, so as to combine the certain gains of a peaceful trader with the more hazardous venture of a licensed sea-robber who takes by the strong hand. If the license should expire before his rapacity was satisfied, he would affect ignorance while he could, and when that was no longer practicable, throw off all disguise and hoist the black flag openly at the main. To this end he had armed his brigantine with the heaviest guns she could carry; had taken in store of provisions, water, spare tackle, gunpowder, pistols, cutlasses, and musquetoons; had manned her with the best seamen and wildest spirits he could lay hands on. These items had run up a considerable bill. He was now preparing a detailed statement of the cost, for the information of his friends in Leadenhall Street.

And all this time, had he only known it, fortune was preparing for him, without effort on his part, the independence he would risk life and character to gain. That very sou'-wester wailing up the narrow street was rattling the windows of a castle on a hill hundreds of miles away, and disturbing the last moments of a dying man in his lordly bedchamber; was driving before it, over a bleak, barren moor, pelting storms

of rain to drench the cloaked and booted heir, riding post to reach that deathbed; sowing in a weak constitution the seeds of an illness that would allow him but a brief enjoyment of his inheritance; and the next in succession, the far-off cousin, was making up his accounts in the humble parlour of a seaport pot-house, because he was to sail for the Spanish main with the next tide.

"One, two, tree!"—thump—"one, two, tree!"—thump—"*Balancez! Chassez. Un, deux, trois!*" Thump after thump, louder and heavier than before. The rafters shook, the ceiling quivered. The captain rose, irritated and indignant, to call fiercely for the landlord. Butter-faced Bob, anticipating a storm, wisely turned a deaf ear, ensconcing himself in the back kitchen, whence he refused to emerge. The captain shouted again, and receiving no answer, walked into the passage.

"Stow that noise!" he halloed from the foot of the half-dozen wooden steps that led to the upper floor. "Who is to get any business done with a row like that going on aloft, as if the devil was dead and the ship gone overboard?"

The captain's voice was powerful and his language plain, but the only reply he received was a squeak from the fiddle, a wail from the dog, and a "One, two, tree"—thump—louder than ever. His patience began to fail.

"Zounds! man," he broke out; "will you leave off that cursed noise, or must I come up and make you?"

Then the fiddle stopped, the dog was silent, and children's voices were heard laughing heartily. The last sound would have appeased the captain had his wrath been ever so high, but a strange, puzzled expression overspread his features while he received the following answer in an accent that denoted the speaker was no Englishman.

"You are a rude, gross man. I sall continue my instructions to my respectable young friends in the dance wizout your permission. Monsieur, you are insolent. *Tiens!*"

The last word carried with it such an amount of anger, defiance, and contempt, as can only be conveyed in that monosyllable by a Frenchman. The captain's frown changed to a broad smile, but he affected wrath none the less, while he exclaimed in a coarse, sailor-like voice—

"Insolent! you dancing dog of a mounseer! Insolent! I'll teach you manners afore I've done with you. If you don't drop it now—this instant—I'll come aloft in a pig's whisper, aud pull you down by the ears!"

"Ears! *Les oreilles!*" repeated the voice above stairs,

in a tone of repressed passion, that seemed to afford his antagonist intense amusement. "*Soyez tranquil, mes enfants.* My children, do not derange yourselves. Sir, you have insulted me; you have insulted my society. You shall answer me. *Monsieur! vous allez me rendre raison!*"

Thus speaking, the dancing-master, for such was the foreign gentleman whose professional avocations the parlour-lodger had interrupted, made his appearance at the head of the stairs, with a small fiddle under his arm and a sheathed rapier in his hand; the passage below was quite dark, but the light from an open door behind him brought his figure into relief, whilst the skipper, on the contrary, remained unseen in the gloom. Notwithstanding that the one was in a towering passion, the other shook with suppressed laughter.

"Come on," he shouted roughly, though he could scarce command his voice, adding in a more natural tone, and with a perfect French accent—"*On prétend, dans les Mousquetaires du Roi, que monsieur est de la première force pour l'epée!*"

The effect was instantaneous. With one spring the dancing-master was upon him, kissing both his cheeks, hugging him in his arms, and repeating, with eyes full of tears—

"Captain George! Captain George! My comrade, my captain, my officer; and I thought I was without a friend in this miserable country; without a friend and without a *sou!* Now I have found the one, I don't care about the other. Oh, what happiness! What fortune! What luck!"

The former captain of musketeers seemed equally pleased, if in a less demonstrative manner, at this unexpected meeting, though he had been better prepared for so strange a termination of their dispute by his recognition of the other's voice before he caught sight of his figure. Now he pulled him into the parlour, sent for Butter-faced Bob to fill the capacious punch-bowl, pressed him into a chair with both hands on his shoulders, and looked gravely into his face, saying—

"Eugène, I owe you my life, and I am a man who never left a debt unpaid."

CHAPTER XXIV

A VOLUNTEER

BEAUDÉSIR, by the wretched light of two tallow-candles, looked paler, thinner, more dejected, than even that pale, thin, anxious recruit who had joined the Grey Musketeers with so formidable a character as a master of defence some months before. No wonder. He was an enthusiast at heart, and an enthusiast can seldom withstand the pressure of continuous adversity. A temporary gleam of sunshine, indeed, warms him up to the highest pitch of energy, daring, and intellectual resource; nay, he will battle nobly against the fiercest storm so long as the winds blow, the thunder peals overhead, and less exalted spirits fly cowering to the nearest shelter; but it is in a bitter, bleak, protracted frost that he droops and fades away. Give him excitement, even the excitement of pain, and he becomes a hero. Put him to mere drudgery, though it be the honest drudgery of duty, and he almost ceases to be a man.

There is, nevertheless, something essentially elastic in the French character, which even in such a disposition as Beaudésir's preserved him from giving way to utter despair. Though he might well be excused for repining, when thus compelled to gain his bread by teaching the landlord's children to dance at a low pot-house, yet this young man's natural temperament enabled him to take interest even in so unworthy an occupation, and he was jealous enough of their progress to resent that rude interruption he experienced from the parlour with a flash of the old spirit cherished in the King's Musketeers.

Still he looked pale and wan, nor was it till George had forced on him a beaker of steaming punch that his eye recovered its brightness and the blood mantled once more in his clear sallow cheek.

"And you escaped them?" said the captain, reverting to the fatal night of their affray in the Montmirail gardens. "Escaped them without a scratch! Well, it was ten to one

against you, and I cursed the duke with all my heart as I galloped on towards the coast when I thought of your predicament. Guard-room, court-martial, confession, and a firing party was the best I could wish you; for on the reverse of the card I pictured a *lettre de cachet*, and imprisonment for life in Vincennes or the Bastile! But how did you get away? and, above all, how did you elude the search afterwards?"

Eugène wet his lips with the hot punch, which he seemed to relish less than his more robust comrade, and looked distrustfully about him while he replied—

"I had little difficulty in extricating myself from the gardens, my captain, for when I had disposed of Bras-de-Fer, there was no *real* swordsman left. The musketeers fight well, no doubt; but they are yet far from true perfection in the art, and their practice is more like our fishermen's cudgel-play than scientific fencing. I wounded two of them slightly, made a spring at the wall, and was in the street at the moment you entered the prince-marshal's carriage. My difficulty then was, where to conceal myself. I do not know Paris thoroughly, to begin with, and I confess I shuddered at the idea of skulking for weeks in some squalid haunt of vice and misery. I think I had rather have been taken and shot down at once."

"You would not have been safe even in dens like those," interrupted the other. "Our Débonnaire is not so refined in his orgies but that I believe every garret in the Faubourgs is frequented by himself and his roués. Bah! when we drew pay from Louis le Grand at least we served a *gentleman*. The Jesuits would have been your best chance. Why did you not take refuge with them?"

Eugène shuddered, and the pale face turned paler still, but he did not answer the question.

"When we used to hunt the hare in Normandy," he resumed, "I have observed that, if hard pressed, she would return to her form, and often thus made her escape, whereas the wolf and the stag, flying straight away, were generally run down. Like the hare, then, I doubled back and lay hid in the very house where I habitually lodged. It was the first place they searched, but they never came near it again; and the second day an old comrade found me out, took me to his own home, and furnished me with a disguise."

"An old comrade!" repeated the captain. "*Bravo!* Ah! we had always plenty of *esprit de corps* in the musketeers. It was Adolphe, I'll wager a crown, or the young Count de Guiches, or Bellegarde!"

"None of these, my captain," explained Eugène. "It was

no musketeer; Black, Red, or Grey. When I said comrade, I meant an old college friend. It was an abbé. I know not why I should keep it secret. Abbé Malletort."

The captain pondered.

"Abbé Malletort!" said he. "That is more than strange. The Regent's confidant; his chief adviser, men said; his principal favourite! He must have had some reason—some deep-laid scheme of double treachery. I know the man. A smooth-spoken churchman; a pleasant fellow to drink with, and a good judge of drill. But if it was his interest to betray the poor thing, I wouldn't trust him with the life of a dog!"

"You little know him," urged the other eagerly. "Generous, kind, and secret—had it not been for his advice and his exertions I should never have got away alive. He kept me a fortnight in his apartment, till the heat of the pursuit was over and Paris had ceased to talk of our affray, which everybody believed an organised conspiracy of the Huguenots—of the Jansenists—of the young king's party—of the British Government. What shall I say?—of the Great Mogul. I did not dare show myself, of course. I could only hear the news from my friend, and I saw him but seldom. I was forced to leave Paris at last without knowing how far the disturbance affected the ladies in whose grounds it took place. I tried hard to find out, but it was impossible."

The captain glanced sharply in his face, and took a strong gulp at the punch. Eugène continued—

"I got through the barrier with an Italian company of jugglers, disguised as a Pantaleone. It was not too amusing to be obliged to perform antics for the amusement of the Guard, fortunately they were of the Prince de Condé's regiment, which had just marched into Paris. But the mountebanks were good people, kindly, and perfectly trustworthy. They were polite enough to say that I might make an excellent livelihood if I would but take in earnest to the business. I left them at Rouen, and from that place reached the seaboard on foot. My object was to take refuge in England. Here alone I felt I should be safe for a time, and when the storm should blow over I hoped to return again. I little knew what a climate it is! what a country! what people! They are somewhat better when you are used to them, and I own I accustom myself more easily than I could have believed to their beef, their beer, their barbarous language, and their utter want of politeness. But they have been kind to me, these rough islanders. It was an English fishing-boat that landed me from Havre, and the fisherman

made me stay a week in his house for nothing because he discovered accidentally that I had exhausted my purse to pay for my passage. Since then, my captain, I have supported myself by teaching these awkward English to dance. It is a noble exercise after all, were they not so stiff, so ungraceful! And yet my pupils make progress! These children above stairs have already begun the minuet. Egotist that I am! Tell me, my captain, how you too come to find yourself in this miserable town, without gardens, without barriers, without barracks, without *Hôtel de Ville*, without a church, even without an opera!"

The captain smiled.

"You have a good right to ask," said he, "since, but for you, I should not have been here at this moment. When I drew on the Regent that night, as I would have drawn on the young king himself had I seen him guilty of such an outrage, I was, as you know, surrounded and attacked by an escort of my own men. I tell you, Beaudésir, I never expected to leave the gardens alive, and I do not believe there is another fencer in France who could have helped me out of so awkward a scrape. I was sorry to see our old Bras-de-Fer go down, I admit; but what would you have? When it's give and take, thrust and parry, ten against two, one cannot stand on these little delicacies of feeling. As I vanished through the garden-gate I looked for you everywhere, but there was no time to lose, and I thought we could escape more easily separate than in company. I knew you were neither down nor taken, because there was no shout of triumph from the men to announce the fact. The Prince de Château-Guerrand, my old general, was standing at the door of his coach when I gained the street. How he came there I am at a loss to guess, for you may believe I asked no questions; but that you and he should have dropped from the clouds at the Hôtel Montmirail, in the moment of my need, is one of those happy strokes of accident by which battles are won, and which we call fortune of war. I thought him a martinet when I was on his staff, with his everlasting parades, and reports, and correspondence, to say nothing of his interminable stories about Turenne, but I always knew his heart was in the right place. 'Jump in!' said he, catching me by the arm. 'Drive those English horses to death, and take the coach where you will!' In five minutes we were out of Paris, and half a league off on our way to the coast I hope the English horses may have survived the journey but they brought me to my first relay as fast as ever I went

in the saddle, and I knew that with half an hour's start of everything I was safe. Who was to question a captain of King's Musketeers riding post for England on the Regent's business? The relays were even so good that I had time to stop and breakfast comfortably, at leisure, and to feed my horse, half-way through the longest stage. I had little delay when I reached the Channel. The wind was easterly, and before my horse had done shaking himself on the quay, an honest fellow had put his two sons, a spare oar, and a keg of brandy, on board a shallop about as weatherly as an egg-shell, hoisted a sail the size of a pocket-handkerchief, and stood out manfully with a following wind and an ebb tide. I know the Channel well, and I was as sure as he must have been that the wind would change when the tide turned, and we should be beating about, perhaps in a stiffish breeze, all night. It was not for me to baulk him, however, and I only stipulated for a loaf or two of bread and a beaker of water in the bows. I tell you before they led my horse to the stable, we were a cable's length off shore. A fair wind, Eugène, does not always make a short voyage. At sundown it fell to a dead calm. The lads and the old man, and I, who speak to you, took our turns, and pulled like galley-slaves at the oars. With the moon-rise, a light breeze came up from the south-west, and it freshened by degrees till at midnight it was blowing half a gale. The egg-shell behaved nobly, and swam like a duck, but it took all the old man's time to steer her, and the sons said as many *Aves* before dawn as would have lasted a whole convent for a month. At one time I feared we must put her head about, and run for it, on the chance of making Ambleteuse, or even Calais, but the old fellow who owned her had a conscience, and to give him his due he was a first-rate sailor. The wind moderated at sunrise, drawing round by the south, and at noon we had made Beachy Head, when it fell a dead calm, with a ground swell that was no child's play when we laid out on our oars. By dint of hard pulling we ran her ashore on the English coast about sundown, and my friend put off again with his two sons, none the worse for the voyage, and all the better for some twenty gold pieces with which I paid my passage. He deserved it, for he earned it fairly. She was but an egg-shell, as I said before, but she swam like a duck; it's only fair to allow that."

"And now, my captain," asked Beaudésir, looking round the strangely furnished apartment, "you are living here? you are settled? you are a householder? Are you reconciled to

spend your life in this dirty little town, ill-paved, ill-lighted, smelling of salt water and tar, where it always rains, and they bring you nothing to drink but black beer and hot punch?"

Captain George laughed heartily.

"Not such a bad thing that hot punch," said he, "when you can get neither chambertin, burgundy, nor bordeaux. But I understand you nevertheless, comrade. It is not likely that a man who has served Louis le Grand in the musketeers would be content to vegetate here like a wisp of sea-weed left at high-water mark. It was lucky I met you to-night. In twenty-four hours, at most, I hope to be off the Needles if the wind holds."

Beaudésir looked interrogatively at the pile of accounts on the table.

"You have turned trader, my captain?" said he. "You will make a fortune in two voyages. At college they pretended I had some skill in reading characters. You have luck written on your forehead. I wish I was going with you, were it only as a clerk."

Captain George pondered for a while before he answered, nay, he filled and emptied his glass, took two or three turns in the narrow apartment, which admitted indeed but of what sailors call "a fisherman's walk—two steps and overboard," and finally, pulling back the shutter, pointed to the light in the foretop of his brigantine.

"You won't catch me afloat again," said he, "in a craft like a walnut-shell, with a scrap of paper for a sail. No, no. There she rides, my lad, the lady that would take me round the world, and never wet a stitch on my back from head to heel. Why, close-hauled, in a stiff breeze, there's not a king's cutter in the Channel can hold her own with her; and off a wind, she'd have the whole fleet hull-down in six hours, making such good weather of it, too, all the while! I wish you could see her by daylight, with her straight run, and her raking masts, and bran new spars, and a fresh lick of paint I gave her in dock before we came round. She looks as trim as a pincushion, and as saucy as a dancing-girl. She carries a few popguns too, in case of accidents; and when she shows her teeth, she means to bite, you may take your oath! I'll tell you what, Eugène, you must come on board to-morrow before I weigh. I should like to show you over the *Bashful Maid* myself, and I hope to get my anchor up and shake out my fore-topsail with the afternoon tide."

Landsman, Frenchman, though he was, Beaudésir's eyes kindled, and he caught his friend's enthusiasm like wild-fire.

"I would give my right arm to be going with you," said he. "Excitement, adventure, storms, seamanship, and all the wonders of the tropics! While for me, muddy beer, gloomy fogs, dirty streets, and clumsy English children learning to dance! Well! every man to his trade. Here's a good voyage to you, and my best wishes!"

Again he wet his lips with the punch, now grown cold and sticky in his glass. Captain George was so preoccupied, he forgot to acknowledge the courtesy.

"Can you keep accounts?" he asked abruptly, pointing to the papers on the table.

"Any schoolboy might keep such as these," answered Eugène, running his eye over one of the columns, and adding, as he examined it. "Nevertheless, my captain, here is an error that will falsify the whole sum."

He pointed to a mistake in the numerals that had repeatedly escaped the other's observation, and from which much of his labour had arisen. In a few minutes, he had gone through, and corrected as many pages of calculation. The figures came right now, as if by magic. Captain George had found what he wanted.

"Where did you learn all this?" he inquired in astonishment.

"At Avranches, in Normandy," was the answer.

"Where they taught you to fence?"

"Precisely; and to shoot with musquetoon or pistol. I can pick the ace of diamonds off a card at fifteen paces with either weapon."

He spoke modestly, as he always did of his proficiency in such feats of skill. They came so easily to him.

"Will you sail with me?" asked George frankly. "You can help me with my papers, and earn your share of the plun—— I should say of the profits. No, my friend! you shall not leap blindfold. Listen. I have letters of marque in my cabin, and I mean them to hold good whether peace be proclaimed or not. It may be, we shall fight with a rope round our necks. The gains are heavy, but the risk is great."

"I never count risk!" was the reply.

"Then finish the punch!" said Captain George; and thus the bargain was ratified, which added yet one more to the rôle of characters Beaudésir was destined to enact on the stage of life.

CHAPTER XXV

THREE PRESSED MEN

WHILE the occupants of the parlour were sipping punch, those of the taproom had gone systematically through the different stages of inebriety—the friendly, the argumentative, the captious, the communicative, the sentimental, the quarrelsome, the maudlin-affectionate, and the extremely drunk. By nightfall, neither Smoke-Jack, Bottle-Jack, nor Slap-Jack could handle a clay-pipe without breaking it, nor fix their eyes steadily on the candle for five consecutive moments. Notwithstanding, however, the many conflicting opinions that had been broached during their sitting, there were certain points on which they agreed enthusiastically—that they were the three finest fellows under the sun, that there was no calling like seamanship, no element like salt water, and no craft in which any one of them had yet sailed so lively in a sea-way as this, which seemed now to roll and pitch and stagger beneath their besotted senses. With a confirmed impression, varied only by each man's own experience, that they were weathering a gale under considerable difficulties, in a low latitude, and that it was their watch on deck, though they kept it somewhat unaccountably below, all three had gone through the abortive ceremony they called "pricking for the softest plank," had pulled their rough sea-coats over their heads, and lain down on the floor among the spittoons, to sleep out the dreamless sleep of intoxication.

Long before midnight, Butter-faced Bob, looking in, well-satisfied, beheld his customers of the afternoon now transformed into actual goods and chattels, bales of bone and sinew and courage, that he could sell, literally by weight, at an enormous price, and for ready money. While he turned the

light of his candle from one sleeper to another, he was running over a mental sum comprising all the elementary rules of arithmetic. He added the several prices of the recumbent articles in guineas. He subtracted the few shillings'-worth of liquor they had consumed. . He multiplied by five the hush-money he expected, over and above, from the purchaser, and finally, he divided the total, in anticipation, between himself, his wife, the tax-gatherer, and the most pressing of his creditors.

When he had finished these calculations, he returned to the parlour, where Captain George sat brooding over the remains of his punch, the late enlisted recruit having retired to pack up his fiddle and the very small stock of clothes he possessed. Their bargain was soon concluded, although there was some little difficulty about delivering the goods. Notwithstanding, perhaps in consequence of, the many cases of oppression that had stained the last half of the preceding century, a strong reaction had set in against anything in the shape of kidnapping; and a press-gang, even for a king's ship, was not likely to meet with toleration in the streets of a seaport town. Moreover, suspicions had already been aroused as to the character of the *Bashful Maid.* A stricter discipline seemed to be observed on board that wicked-looking craft than was customary even in the regular service, and this unusual rigour was accounted for by the lawless conduct of her "liberty-men" when they did come ashore. Nobody knew better than her captain that, under the present aspect of political affairs in London, it would be wise to avoid notice by the authorities. The only thing he dreaded on earth and sea was a vision, by which he was haunted daily, till he could get all his stores shipped. It represented a sloop-of-war detached from the neighbouring squadron in the Downs, coming round the Point, dropping her anchor in the harbour, and sending a lieutenant and boat's crew on board to overhaul his papers, and, may be, summarily prevent his beautiful craft from standing out to sea.

Neither was Butter-faced Bob rash or indiscreet where his own interests were affected. Using a metaphor he had picked up from his customers, it was his boast that he could "keep a bright look-out, and steer small" with the best of them; and he now impressed on Captain George, with great earnestness, the necessity of secrecy and caution in getting the three fresh hands down to the quay and tumbling them up the side of the brigantine.

Had the captain known their inclinations, he might have

made his own bargain, and saved three-fourths of the expense, but his landlord took care that in such cases the principals should never come together, telling the officers they could make what terms they chose when the men found themselves fairly trapped and powerless in blue water, while he kept the new hands in a state of continuous inebriety so long as they dwelt in his house, which rendered them utterly reckless of everything but liquor and tobacco. His shining face wore the well-satisfied expression of a man who has performed a good action, while he motioned with his thumb to the adjoining taproom.

"I've a cart ready in the backyard," said he, "and a few empty casks to tumble in along with our chaps. It will only look like the fresh water going aboard, so as you may weigh with the morning tide. Will they send a boat off if you show a light?"

Captain George nodded. The boatswain whom he had left in charge, and on whom he could rely, had directions for a certain code of signals, amongst which, the waving of a lantern thrice from the end of the quay was to be answered by a boat ashore.

"We'd best get them in at once, then," said Bob, only anxious now to be rid of his guests. "I'll go and put the horse to, and perhaps you and me and the French gentleman, as he seems a friend of yours, can manage it between us."

Accordingly, Bob betook himself to the backyard and the stable, while Beaudésir was summoned to assist the process of embarkation. In ten minutes all was prepared, and it was only necessary to lift the three drunken tars into the carriage provided for them.

With the two elder and heavier men there was no difficulty. They grunted, indeed, impatiently, though without opening their eyes, and seemed to sleep as soundly, while being dragged along a dusty passage and hoisted into a narrow cart amongst empty water-casks, as if they took their rest habitually under such disadvantages; but Slap-Jack's younger constitution had not been so completely overcome, and it was necessary to soothe him by a fiction which has possessed in all times an indescribable charm for the seafaring imagination. Bob whispered impressively in his ear that he had been sent for, thus in the dead of night, by the admiral's daughter, who had conceived for him a fatal and consuming passion, having seen him in his "long togs" in the street. Muttering inarticulately about "Alice," Slap-Jack at once abandoned himself to the illusion, and dropped off to sleep

again, with delightful anticipations of the romantic fate in store for him.

As the wheels rumbled over the rough streets, through the rainy gusts and the dark night, followed by Captain George and Beaudésir, the latter could not but compare the vehicle to a dead-cart, carrying away its burden through some city stricken with the plague. This pleasing fancy he communicated to his comrade, who made the following inconsequent reply—

"I only hope the harbour-watch may be as drunk as they are. It's our best chance to get them on board without a row. There's her light, Eugène. If the sky would lift a little, you might make out her spars, the beauty! but I'm almost afraid now you'll have to wait for dawn."

The harbour-watch was drunk, or at least fast asleep in the sentry-box on wheels that afforded him shelter, and the sky did not lift in the least degree; so very soon after the waving of the lantern a boat from the *Bashful Maid* touched the stone steps of the quay, having been cunningly impelled thither by a screw-driving process, worked with one oar at the stern, and which made far less noise than the more powerful practice of pulling her with even strokes. Two swarthy ill-looking fellows sat in the boat, and a scowl passed over their features when they saw their captain's attitude of precaution, with one hand on the pistol he wore at his belt. Perhaps they were disappointed not to be able to elude his vigilance, and have one more run on shore before they sailed. It was no use trying to "gammon the skipper," though. They had discovered that already, and they lent their aid with a will, when they found it must be so, to place their future comrades in the same predicament as themselves.

The whole affair was managed so quietly that, even had the harbour-guard, a brandy-faced veteran of sixty, remained wide-awake and perfectly sober, he might have been excused for its escaping his vigilance. Bob himself, standing with his empty cart on the quay, could hardly hear the dip of the oars as his late guests were pulled cautiously away. He did not indeed remain there very long to listen. He had done with them one and all—for was not the score paid? and it behoved him to return home and prepare for fresh arrivals. He turned, therefore, with a well-satisfied glance towards the light in the foretop of the brigantine, and wished the *Bashful Maid* a good voyage, while at the same moment Beaudésir stumbled awkwardly up her side. To the latter this was, indeed, a new and startling phase of life, but it was full of

excitement, and consequently very much to his taste. Captain George, taking him below, and pointing out a couch in his cabin on which to pass the rest of the night, thought he had seen a good deal of worse material for a privateer's-man, or even a pirate, than this pale gentle young adventurer, late of the Grey Musketeers.

Covered by a boat-cloak, and accommodated with two or three cushions, Eugène's bed was quite as comfortable as that which he occupied at the Fox and Fiddle. It was long past sunrise when he awoke, and realising his position he ran on deck with a landsman's usual conviction that he was already miles out at sea. It was startling, and a little disappointing, to observe the quay, the straggling buildings of the town, the lighthouse, and other well-known objects within musket-shot, and to find that the brigantine, in spite of her lively motions, still rode at anchor, not half a cable's length from a huge, smooth, red buoy, which was dancing and dipping in the morning sun as if it were alive. There was a fresh breeze off shore, and a curl on the green sparkling water that, far away down Channel, beyond the Point, swelled into a thousand varying lines of white, while a schooner in the offing might be observed standing out to sea with a double reef in her topsails. One of the crew, sluicing the deck with a bucket of water, that eddied round Eugène's feet, pointed her out to his mate with an oath, and the mate, a tall strong negro, grinning hideously, replied "Iss! very well!"

The *Bashful Maid* herself, rising buoyantly to each succeeding wave, ere with a dip and toss of her bows she sent the heavy spray-drops splashing over her like a sea-bird, seemed chafing with eagerness to be off. There was but little of the bustle and confusion on board usually produced by clearing out of port. The deck, though wet and slippery, was as clean as a dinner-plate, the yards were squared, the ropes coiled, new sails had been bent, and the last cask of fresh water was swinging over the hold: trim and taut, every spar and every sheet seemed to express "outward bound," not to mention a blue-Peter flying at the fore.

All this Eugène observing, began to suffer from an uncomfortable sensation in the pit of his stomach, which parched his mouth, depressed his spirits, and destroyed his appetite. He was not, however, so much affected by it but that he could take note of his fellow-voyagers, an occupation sufficiently interesting when he reflected on the probable result of

their preparations. In his experience of life he had never yet seen such an assemblage. The crew had indeed been got together with considerable care, but with utter disregard to nationality or uniformity of any kind. The majority were Englishmen, but there were also Swedes, Dutch, French, Portuguese, a negro, and even a Spaniard on board. The brigantine was strongly manned for her size, and the hands, with scarcely an exception, were stout daring fellows, capable of any exploit and a good many enormities, but such as a bold commander, cool, judicious, and determined, might bring into a very efficient state of discipline. Eugène could not but remark, however, that on the face of each was expressed impatience of delay, and an ardent desire to be in blue water. The liberty to go on shore had been stopped, and indeed the pockets of these gentlemen-adventurers, as the humblest of them called themselves, were completely cleaned out. Obviously, therefore, it would be well to lose no time in refilling them.

Leaning over the side, lazily watching the lap and wash of the leaping water, Eugène was rapidly losing himself in his own thoughts, when, rousing up, he felt the captain's hand on his shoulder, and heard the captain's voice whisper in his ear—

"Come below with me; I shall want your assistance by and by, and you have had no breakfast yet."

His qualms took flight at the prospect of fresh excitement, though the offer of breakfast was received with little enthusiasm, and he followed the captain into his comfortable and well-furnished cabin. Here he learned that, while he was sleeping, George had hailed a fishing-boat returning warily into harbour, and, under pretence of buying fresh fish, boarded her with a bottle or two of spirits and a roll of tobacco. In ten minutes he extracted all the fisherman had to tell, and discovered that a large king's ship was cruising in the offing, watching, as his informant opined, the very port in which they lay. Under these circumstances, Captain George considered it would be prudent to wait till midnight, when they might run out of the harbour, with wind and tide in their favour, and so showing the man-of-war a clean pair of heels, be hull-down and out of sight before sunrise.

"There's nothing that swims can touch her in squally weather like this," continued the captain, "if she can get an hour's start; and I wouldn't mind running under his very boltsprit in the dark, if this wind holds. My chief difficulty

is about the men. There will be black looks, and something very like mutiny, if I keep them twelve more hours in sight of the beer-shops without liberty for shore. Those drunken rascals too, that we hove aboard last night, will have come to themselves by that time, and we shall perhaps have some trouble in persuading them they are here of their own free will. You must help me, Eugène, all day. Between us we must watch the crew like a cat watches a mouse. Once we're in blue water, you'll have nothing to do but sit in my cabin and amuse yourself."

The skipper understood the nature of those with whom he had to deal. When the men saw no disposition to get the anchor up, when noon passed and they went to dinner as usual with the brigantine's head pointing steadily to windward, when another tide ebbed and flowed, but failed to waft them away from the temptations of port, they began to growl freely, without, however, proceeding to any overt acts of insubordination, and towards evening they became pacified with the anticipation of weighing anchor before the following day. The hours passed wearily to all on board, excepting perhaps the three Jacks, who, waking simultaneously at sunrise, turned round, perfectly satisfied, to go to sleep again, and so recovered complete possession of their faculties towards the dusk of the evening. They had been stowed away on some spare bunting outside the door of the captain's cabin. Their conversation, therefore, though carried on in a low tone, was distinctly audible both to him and Beaudésir, as they sat waiting for midnight and the turn of the tide. After a few expressions of astonishment, and vague inquiries how they got there, each sailor seemed to realise his position pretty clearly and without much dissatisfaction. Bottle-Jack shrewdly suspected he was once more at the old trade. Smoke-Jack was comforted by the prospect of refilling his empty pockets, and Slap-Jack, whilst vowing eternal fidelity to Alice, seemed impressed with the flattering notion that somehow his own attractions and the good taste of the admiral's daughter were at the bottom of it all.

The craft, they agreed, was a likely one, the fittings shipshape Bristol-fashion, the cruise promised to be prosperous; but such an unheard-of solecism as to weigh without one more drinking bout in honour of the expedition, was not to be thought of; therefore Bottle-Jack opined it was indispensable they should immediately go ashore. The others agreed without scruple. One difficulty alone presented itself: the quay stood a good quarter of a mile off, and even in harbour

it was rather a stormy night for a swim. As Slap-Jack observed, "it couldn't be done comfortable without a plank of some kind; but most like, if they waited till dark, they might make free with the skipper's dingy hanging over the starn!"

"'Tis but totting up another figure or two on the score with old Shiney-face," argued Smoke-Jack, who, considering his profession, was of a frugal turn of mind, and who little knew how completely the purchase-money of his own body and bones had wiped off the chalk behind the door. "Such a voyage as we're a-goin' to make will square longer accounts than ours, though I am uncommon dry, considerin'. Just one more spree on the quiet, you know, my sons, and back to duty again as steady as a sou'-wester. There's no fear they'll weigh without us, a-course?"

"A-course not," grunted old Bottle-Jack, who could scarce have been half sober yet, to hazard such a suggestion. "The skipper is quite the gentleman, no doubt, and most like when he misses us he'll send the ship's pinnace ashore with his compliments."

"Pinnace be blowed!" retorted Slap-Jack; "anyway you may be sure he won't sail without the dingy;" and in this more reasonable conclusion the others could not but acquiesce.

With a smile on his face, the captain listened to the further development of their plan. One by one they would creep aft without their shoes, unobserved by the anchor-watch, now sure to be on the forecastle (none of the Jacks had a clear idea of the craft in which they were plotting); if anyone could put his hand on a bit of grease it would be useful to make the tackle work noiselessly. When they reached the stern, Slap-Jack should seat himself in the dingy, as being the lightest weight; the others would lower away, and as soon as she touched water, shin down after him, and shove off. There was no time to lose, best set about it at once.

Captain George whispered in his companion's ear, "Take my hat and cloak, and go forward to the hold with a lantern in your hand. Make plenty of noise as you pass those lubbers, but do not let them see your face."

Eugène obeyed, and Captain George, blowing out the lights, set himself to watch at the stern windows.

CHAPTER XXVI

"YO-HEAVE-YO!"

IT was pitch dark in the cabin, but although under a cloudy sky there was light enough to discern objects on deck or alongside. As Smoke-Jack observed, stealing aft with bare feet, and in a louder whisper than was prudent, "A good pair of eyes might see as far as a man could heave a bull by the tail." George had determined to give the crew a lesson, once for all, in the matter of discipline, and felt well-pleased to make example of the new-comers, who must be supposed as yet ignorant of his system. So he sat in the dark, pistol in hand, at the stern window, which was open, and watched like the hunter for his prey. He heard the three Jacks creeping along the deck overhead, he heard low whispers and a smothered laugh, followed by a few brief expostulations as to priority of disembarkation, the language far less polite than the intention; lastly, he heard the tackle by which his boat was made fast running gently over its blocks. Then he cocked his pistol without noise, and laughed to himself.

Gradually the cabin window was obscured. A dark object passed smoothly down, and revealed in its progress a human figure indistinctly visible above its black horizontal mass, which was indeed the slow-descending boat, containing no less a personage than the adventurous Slap-Jack; also two lines of tackle were dimly visible supporting that boat's head. A turn of the body, as he covered them steadily with his pistol, enabled the captain to bring these two lines into one.

Hand and eye were equally true. He was sure of his mark before he pulled the trigger. With a flash that lighted up the cabin, and an explosion that filled it with smoke, the bullet cut clean through the "falls," or ropes supporting the boat's head, bringing her perpendicularly on end, and shooting every article she contained—planks, bottom-boards, stretchers, oars, boat-hook, an empty hencoop, and the astonished occupant—plump into seven fathom of water.

Nor was the consternation created by this alarming capsize confined to the unfortunate Slap-Jack. His comrades, lowering away industriously from the taffrail, started back in the utmost bewilderment, the anchor-watch rushed aft, persuaded a mutiny had broken out, and in grievous indecision whether to take the skipper's part or assist in cutting his throat. The crew tumbled up the hatchway, and blundered about the deck, asking each other absurd questions, and offering wild suggestions, if anything were really amiss, as to breaking open the spirit-room. Nay, the harbour-guard himself awoke from his nap, emerged from his sentry-box, took a turn on the quay, hailing loudly, and receiving no answer, was satisfied he had been dreaming, so swore and turned in again.

Captain George reloaded his pistol, and sang out lustily, "Man overboard! Show a light on the deck there, and heave a rope over the side. Bear a hand to haul him in, the lubber! I don't much think he'll want to try that game in a hurry again!"

Meanwhile, hapless Slap-Jack was incapacitated for the present from that, or indeed any other game involving physical effort. A plank, falling with him out of the boat, had struck him on the head and stunned him; seventy fathom of water would have floated him no better than seven, and with the first plunge he went down like a stone. Captain George had intended to give him a fright and a ducking; but now, while he stretched his body out of the cabin window, peering over the gloomy water and listening eagerly for the snort and gasp of a swimmer who never came up, he wished with all his heart that his hand had been less steady on the pistol.

Fortunately, however, Beaudésir, after he had fulfilled the captain's orders by personating him at the hold, remained studiously on watch. It was a peculiarity of this man that his faculties seemed always on the stretch, as is often to be observed with those over whom some constant dread impends, or who suffer from the tortures of remorse. At the moment he heard the shot, he sprang to the side, threw off hat and cloak, as if anticipating danger, and kept his eyes eagerly fixed on the water, ready, if need be, for a pounce. The tide was still flowing, the brigantine's head lay to seaward, where all was dark, and fortunately the little light on the ruffled surface was towards the shore. Slap-Jack's inanimate form was carried inwards by the flood, and crossed the moorings of that huge red buoy which Eugène remembered gazing on

listlessly in the morning. Either the contact with its rope woke an instinctive consciousness in the drowning man, or some swirl of the water below brought his body to the surface but for a few seconds Slap-Jack's form became dimly visible, heaving like a wisp of seaweed on a wave. In those few seconds Eugène dashed overboard, cleaving the water to reach him with the long springing strokes of a powerful swimmer.

A drowning man is not to be saved but at the imminent risk of his life who goes in for the rescue, and this gallant feat indeed can only be accomplished by a thorough proficient in the art; so on the present occasion it was well that Beaudésir felt as much at home in the water as on dry land. How the crew cheered the Frenchman while he was hauled on board with his dripping burden; how the two Jacks who had remained in the brigantine, and were now thoroughly sobered, vowed eternal gratitude to the landsman who had dived for their messmate; how the harbour-guard was once more disturbed by the cheering, and cheered lustily in reply; how Captain George clapped his comrade on the shoulder while he took him below to change his wet garments, and vowed he was fit to be King of France, adding, with a meaning smile, "If ever I go to school again, I'll ask them to give me a berth at Avranches in Normandy!"—all this it is unnecessary to relate; but if the captain gained the respect of the crew by the promptitude with which he resented an attempt at insubordination, the gallant self-devotion of his friend, clerk, supercargo, cabin-passenger, or whatever he was, won their affection and goodwill for the rest of the voyage.

This was especially apparent about sunrise, when Captain George beat to quarters and paraded his whole crew on deck, preparatory to weighing anchor and standing out down Channel with a fair wind and a following tide. He calculated that the King's ship, even if on watch, must be still some distance from land, and he had such implicit confidence in the sailing qualities of his brigantine that if he could only get a fair start he feared a chase from no craft that swam. Owing to his early education and the experiences of his boyhood, notwithstanding his late career in the service of King Louis, he was a seaman at heart. In nothing more so than a tendency to idealise the craft he commanded as if it were a living creature, endowed with feelings and even reason. For him the *Bashful Maid*, with her exquisite trim, her raking masts, her graceful spars, her long fluttering pennon, and her

elaborately carved figure-head, representing a brazen-faced beauty baring her breast boastfully to the breeze, was less a triumph of design and carpentering, of beams, and blocks, and yarn, and varnish, and tar, than a metaphorical mistress, to be cajoled, commanded, humoured, trusted, above all, admired. He spoke of her as possessing affections, caprices, impulses, and self-will. When she answered her helm steadily, and made good weather of it, in a stiff breeze and a heavy sea, she was "behaving admirably"—"she liked the job"—"a man had only to trust her, and give her a new coat of paint now and then, she'd never fail him—not she!" While, on the other hand, she might dive, and plunge, and dip her boltsprit in the brine, shipping seas that swept her decks fore and aft, and she was "only a trifle saucy, the beauty! Carried a weather-helm like the rest of her sex, and must be humoured a bit, till she came round!"

As was the skipper, so were the crew. All these different natures, men of various nations, dispositions, and characters, were equally childlike in their infatuation about the *Bashful Maid*. The densest of them had imagination enough to invest her with a thousand romantic qualities; even the negro would have furiously resented a word in her disparagement—nay, the three newly-shipped Jacks themselves, men of weighty authority in such matters, caught the infection, and were ready to swear by the brigantine, while it was yet so dark they could scarcely see whether she was a three-masted merchantman or a King's cutter.

But when the breeze freshened towards sunrise, and the tide was once more on the turn, the regard thus freely accorded to their ship was largely shared by their new shipmate. Beaudésir, passing forward in the grey light of morning, truth to tell moved only by the restlessness of a man not yet accustomed to perpetual motion, accompanied by the odours of bilge-water and tar, was greeted with admiring glances and kind words from all alike. Dutchman, Swede, Spaniard, vied with each other in expressions of goodwill. Slap-Jack was still below, swaddled in blankets, but his two comrades had tumbled up with the first streaks of dawn, and were loud in their praises, Bottle-Jack vowing Captain Kidd would have made him first-lieutenant on the spot for such a feat, and Smoke-Jack, with more sincerity than politeness, declaring "he couldn't have believed it of a Frenchman!" Nay, the very negro, showing all his teeth as if he longed to eat him, embarked on an elaborate oration in his honour, couched partly in his native language as

spoken on the Gold Coast, partly in a dialect he believed to be English, obscured by metaphor, though sublime doubtless in conception, and prematurely cut short by the shrill whistle of the boatswain, warning all hands without delay to their quarters.

It was an enlivening sight, possessing considerable attractions for such a temperament as Beaudésir's. The clear gap of morning low down on the horizon was widening and spreading every moment over the sky; the breeze, cold and bracing, not yet tempered by the coming sun, freshened sensibly off shore, driving out to sea a grand procession of dark rolling clouds, moving steadily and continuously westward before the day. The lighthouse off the harbour showed like a column of chalk against the dull background of this embankment, vanishing so imperceptibly into light; while to landward, far beyond the low level line of coast, a faint quiver of purple already mingled with the dim grey outline of the smooth and swelling downs.

In harbour, human life had not yet woke up, but the white sea-birds were soaring and dipping, and wheeling joyously on the wing. The breeze whistled through the tackle, the waves leaped and lashed merrily against her sides, and the crew of the brigantine took their places, clean, well-dressed, brown-faced, and bare-footed, on her deck. While the boatswain, who from sheer habit cast an eye continually aloft, observed her truck catch the first gleams of the morning sun, Captain George, carefully attired, issued from his cabin with a telescope under his arm, and made his first and last oration to the crew.

"My lads!" said he, "I've beat to quarters, this fine morning, before I get my anchor up, because I want to say a few words to you, and the sooner we understand each other the better! You've heard I'm a soldier. So I am! That's right enough; but, mark you! I dipped my hand in the tar-bucket before I was old enough to carry a sword; so don't you ever think to come over me with skulking, for I've seen that game played out before. Mind you, I don't believe I've got a skulker on board; if I have, let him step forward and show himself. Over the side he goes, and I sail without him! Now, my lads, I know *my* duty and I know *yours*. I'll take care both are done. I'll have no grumbling and no quarrelling. If any man has a complaint to make, let him come to me, and out with it. A quarrelsome chap with his messmates is generally a shy cock when you put him down to fight. I'll have man-of-war's discipline aboard. You all know what

that is, and those that don't like it must lump it. Last night there were three of you tried to take French leave and to steal my boat; I stopped that game with a little friend I keep in my belt. Look ye, my sons, next bout I'll cover the *man* instead of the tackle! I know who they are, well enough, but I mean to forget as soon as ever the anchor's up. I'll have a clean bill of health to take out into blue water. Now, my lads, attend to me! We've a long cruise before us, but we've a craft well-provisioned, well-found, and, I heartily believe, well-manned. Whatever prizes we take, whatever profit we make on the cargo, from skipper to ship's boy, every one shall have his share according to the articles hung up in my cabin. We may have to fight, and we may not; it's the last job you're likely to shirk; but mind this—one skipper's enough for one ship. I'll have no *lawyer* sail with me, and no opinions 'whether or no' before the mast. If you think of disobeying orders, just remember it's a short walk from my berth to the powder-room, and the clink of a flint will square all accounts between captain and crew. If I'm not to be skipper, nobody else shall, and what I say I mean. Lastly, no man is to get drunk except in port. And now, my lads, here's a fair wind, and a following tide! Before we get the fiddle up for a 'Stamp and go, cheerily ho!' we'll give three cheers for the *Bashful Maid*, and then shake out every rag of canvas and make a good run while the breeze holds!"

The men cheered with a will. The captain's notions of sea-oratory were founded on a knowledge of his audience, and answered his purpose better than the most finished style of rhetoric. As the shouting died out, a strong voice was heard, demanding "one cheer more for the skipper." It was given enthusiastically—Slap-Jack, who had sneaked on deck with his head bandaged, having taken this sailor-like method of showing he bore no malice for a ducking, and was indeed only desirous that his late prank should be overlooked. Nevertheless, in the hurry and confusion of getting the anchor up, he contrived to place himself at Beaudésir's side and to grasp him cordially by the hand.

"You *be* a good chap," said this honest seaman, with a touch of feeling that he hid under an affectation of exceeding roughness; "as good a chap as ever broke a biscuit! Look ye, mate; my name's Slap-Jack; so long as I can show my number, when anything's up, you sings out 'Slap-Jack!' and if I don't answer 'Slap-Jack it is!' why"—

The imprecation with which this peculiar acknowledgment

concluded did not render it one whit more intelligible to Beaudésir, who gathered enough, however, from the speaker's vehemence to feel that he had made at least one staunch friend among the crew. By the time he had realised this consoling fact, the brigantine's head, released from the restraint of her cable, swung round to leeward, her strong new sails filled steadily with the breeze, and while the ripple gurgled louder and louder round her bows, already tossing and plunging through the increasing swell, the quay, the lighthouse, the long low spit of land, the town, the downs themselves seemed to glide quietly away; and Beaudésir, despite the beauty of the scene and the excitement of his position, became uncomfortably conscious of a strange desire to retire into a corner, lay himself down at full length, and die, if need be, unobserved. A waft of savoury odours from the cook's galley, where the men's breakfasts were prepared, did nothing towards allaying this untimely despondency, and after a short struggle he yielded, as people always do yield in such cases, and staggering into the cabin, pillowed his head on a couch, and gave himself over to despair.

Ere he raised it again the *Bashful Maid*, making an excellent run down Channel in a south-westerly course, was already a dozen leagues out at sea.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE "BASHFUL MAID"

IF Captain George kept a log, as is probable, or Eugène Beaudésir a diary, as is possible, I have no intention of copying it. In the history of individuals, as of nations, the exception is Stir—the rule Stagnation. There are long links in the Silver Cord, smooth, polished, uniform, one exactly like the other, ere its sameness is varied by the carving of a boss or the flash of a gem. It is only here and there that life-like figures and spirit-stirring scenes start from the dead surface of the Golden Bowl. Perhaps, when both are broken, neither brilliancy nor workmanship, but sterling worth of metal, shall constitute the true value of each.

The *Bashful Maid* found her share of favouring winds and baffling breezes; trim and weatherly, she made the best of them all. Her crew, as they gained confidence in their skipper and became well acquainted amongst themselves, worked her to perfection. In squally weather, she had the great advantage of being over-manned, and could therefore carry the broadest surface of canvas it was possible to show. After a few stormy nights all shook into their places, and every man found himself told off to the duty he was best able to perform. The late captain of musketeers had the knack of selecting men, and of making them obey him. His last-joined hands were perhaps the best of his whole ship's company. Bottle-Jack became boatswain's mate, Smoke-Jack, gunner, and Slap-Jack, captain of the foretop. These three were still fast friends and sworn adherents of Beaudésir. The latter, though he had no ostensible rank or office, seemed, next to the skipper himself, the most influential and the most useful person on board. He soon picked up enough knowledge of navigation to bring his mathematical acquirements into play. He kept the accounts of stores and cargo. He possessed a slight knowledge of medicine and surgery. He played the violin with a taste and feeling that enchanted the Spaniard, his only rival in this accomplishment, and caused

many a stout heart to thrill with unaccustomed thoughts of green nooks and leafy copses, of laughing children and cottage-gardens, and summer evenings at home; lastly, the three Jacks, his fast friends, found him an apt pupil in lessons relating to sheets and tacks, blocks and braces, yards and spars, in fine, all the practical mysteries of seamanship.

During stirring times, such as the first half of the eighteenth century, a brigantine like the *Bashful Maid*, well-armed, well-manned, commanded by a young adventurous captain having letters of marque in his cabin, and no certain knowledge that peace had yet been proclaimed with Spain, was not likely long to preserve her sails unbleached by use nor the paint and varnish undimmed on her hull. Not many months elapsed ere she was very different in appearance from the yacht-like craft that ran past the Needles, carrying Eugène Beaudésir prone and helpless as a log in her after-cabin. He could scarcely believe himself the same man when, bronzed, robust, and vigorous, feeling every inch a sailor, he paced her deck under the glowing stars and the mellow moonlight of the tropics. Gales had been weathered since then, shots fired, prizes taken, and that career of adventure embarked on which possesses so strange a fascination for the majority of mankind, partly, I think, from its permanent uncertainty, partly from its pandering to their self-esteem. A few more swoops, another prize or two taken—pillaged—but suffered to proceed if not worth towing into port, and the cruise would have been so successful, that already the men were calculating their share of profit and talking as if their eventual return to Britain was no longer a wild impossibility. Everything, too, had as yet been done according to fair usage of war. No piracy, no cruelty, nothing that could justify a British three-decker in capturing the brigantine, to impress her crew and hang her captain at his own yardarm. Eugène's counsels had so far prevailed with George that he had resolved on confining himself to the legitimate profits of a privateer, and not overstepping the narrow line of demarcation that distinguished him from a pirate.

While, however, some of her crew had been killed and some wounded, the *Bashful Maid* herself had by no means emerged scathless from her encounters. Eugène was foolish enough to experience a thrill of pride while he marked the grim holes, planked and caulked, in her sides; the workmanlike splicing of such yards and spars as had not suffered too severely for repair, and the carefully mended foresail, now

white and weather-bleached, save where the breadths of darker, newer canvas betrayed it had been riddled by round-shot. But soon his impressionable temperament, catching the influence of the hour, threw off its warlike thoughts and abandoned itself to those gentler associations that could hardly fail to be in the ascendant.

The night was such as is only to be seen in the tropics. Above, like golden lamps, the stars were flaming rather than twinkling in the sky; while low down on the horizon a broad moon, rising from the sea, spread a lustrous path along the gently heaving waves to the very ship's side; a path on which myriads of glittering fairies seemed to dance and revel, and disappear in changing sparkles of light. Through all this blaze of beauty, the brigantine glided smoothly and steadily on her course. For several days and nights not a sail had been altered, not a rope shifted, before that soft and balmy breeze. The men had nothing to do but tell each other interminable yarns and smoke. It was the fair side of the medal, the bloom on the fruit, the smooth of the profession, this enchanted voyage over an enchanted sea.

Eugène revelled in its charm, but with his enjoyment was mingled that quiet melancholy so intimately associated with all beauty in those hearts (and how many of them are there!) which treasure up an impossible longing, a dream that can never come to pass. It is a morbid sentiment, no doubt, which can thus extract from the loveliest scenes of nature, and even from the brightest triumphs of art, a strange wild ecstasy of pain, possessing a fascination of its own; but it is a sentiment to which the most generous and the most noble minds are peculiarly susceptible; a sentiment that in itself denotes excessive capability, for the happiness denied or withheld. Were it better for them to be of duller spirit and coarser fibre, callous to the spur, unequal to the effort? Who knows? I think Beaudésir would not willingly have parted with the sensibility from which he experienced so much pain, from the memories on which, at moments like these, under a moonlit sky, he brooded and dwelt so fondly, yet so despondently, to have obtained in exchange the inexhaustible good-humour of Slap-Jack or the imperturbable self-command of Captain George. Immersed in his own thoughts, he did not observe the captain leave his cabin, walk from sheer habit to the binnacle in order to satisfy himself the brigantine was lying her course, and glance over the side to measure her speed through the water, and he started when the captain placed his hand familiarly on his

shoulder, and jeered him good-humouredly for his preoccupation. These men, whose acquaintance had commenced with important benefits conferred and received on both sides, were now thrown together by circumstances which brought out the finer qualities of both. They had learned thoroughly to depend on each other, and had become fast friends. Perhaps their strongest link was the dissimilarity of their characters. To Beaudésir's romantic and impressionable temperament there had been, from the first, something very imposing in the vigorous and manly nature of Captain George, and the influence of the latter became stronger day by day, when he proved himself as calm, courageous, and capable on the deck of a privateer as he had appeared in his quarters at Paris, commanding a company of the Royal Guards.

For George, again, with his frank, soldier-like manner and somewhat abrupt address, which seemed impatient of anything like delicacy or over-refinement, there was, nevertheless, an unspeakable charm in his friend's half-languid, half-fiery, and wholly romantic disposition, redeemed by a courage no danger could shake, and an address with his weapons few men could withstand. The captain was not demonstrative, far from it, and would have been ashamed to confess how much he valued the society of that pale, studious, effeminate youth, in looks, in manner, in simplicity of thought so much younger than his actual years; who was so often lost in vague day-dreams, and loved to follow up such wild and speculative trains of thought; but who could point the brigantine's bow-chasers more accurately than the gunner himself; who had learned how to hand, reef, and steer before he had been six weeks on board. Their alliance was the natural consequence of companionship between two natures of the same material, so to speak, but of different fabric. Their respective intellects represented the masculine and feminine types. Each supplying that which the other wanted, they amalgamated accordingly. Beaudésir looked up to the musketeer as his ideal of perfection in manhood; Captain George loved Eugène as a brother, and trusted him without reserve.

It was pleasant after the turmoil and excitement of the last few weeks to walk the deck in that balmy region under a serene and moonlit sky, letting their thoughts wander freely to scenes so different on far-distant shores, while they talked of France, and Paris, and Versailles, and a thousand topics all connected with dry land. But Eugène, though he listened with interest, and never seemed tired

of confidences relating to his companion's own family and previous life, frankly and freely imparted, refrained from such confessions in return, and George was still as ignorant of his friend's antecedents as on that memorable day when the pale, dark youth accompanied Bras-de-Fer to their captain's quarters, to be entered on the roll of the Grey Musketeers, after running poor Flanconnade through the body. That they had once belonged to this famous *corps d'élite* neither of them seemed likely to forget. Its merits and its services formed the one staple subject of discourse when all else failed. As in his quarters at Paris he had kept the model of a similar brigantine for his own private solace, so now, in the cabin of the *Bashful Maid*, the skipper treasured up with the greatest care, in a stout sea-chest, a handsome full-dress uniform, covered with velvet and embroidery, flaunting with grey ribbons, and having a coating of thin paper over its silver lace.

There was one topic of conversation, however, on which these young men had never yet embarked, and this is the more surprising, considering their age and the habits of those warriors amongst whom they were so proud to have been numbered. This forbidden subject was the charm of the other sex, and it was perhaps because each felt himself so constituted as to be keenly alive to its power that neither ventured an allusion to the great influence by which, during the first half of life, men's fortunes, characters, happiness, and eventual destiny, are more or less affected. It required a fair breeze, a summer sea, and a moonlight night in the tropics to elicit their opinions on such matters, and the manly, rough-spoken skipper was the first to broach a theme that had been already well-nigh exhausted by the watch on deck—gathered on the forecastle in tranquil enjoyment of a cool, serene air and a welcome interval of repose.

Old Turenne's system of tactics had been declared exploded; the Duke of Marlborough's character criticised; Cavalli's last opera canvassed and condemned. Captain George took two turns of the deck in silence, stopped short at the taffrail, and looked thoughtfully over the stern—

"What is to be the end of it?" he asked abruptly. "More fighting, of course! More prizes, more doubloons, and then? After all, I believe there are things to make a man's life happier than even such a brigantine as this."

"There is heaven on earth, and there is heaven above," answered the other, in his dreamy, half-earnest, half-

speculative way; "and some men, not always the hardest-hearted nor the most vicious, are to be shut out of both. Calvin is a disheartening casuist, but I believe Calvin is right!"

"Steady there!" replied George. "Nothing shall make me believe but that a brave man can sail what course he will, provided his charts are trustworthy and he steers by them. Nothing is impossible, Eugène. If I had thought that, I should have lost heart long ago."

"And then?" asked Beaudésir sadly.

"And then," repeated the captain, with a shudder, "I might have become a brute rather than a man. Do you remember the British schooner we retook from those Portuguese rovers, and the *mustee*[1] who commanded them? I tell you I *hate* to think it possible, and yet I believe a man utterly without hope might come to be such a wretch as that!"

"You never would," said Beaudésir, "and I never should; I *know* it. Even hope may be dispensed with if memory remains. My pity is for those who have neither."

"I could not live without hope," resumed the captain cheerily. "I own I do hope most sincerely, at some future time, for a calmer and happier lot than this; a lot that would also make the happiness of another; and that other so gentle, so trusting, and so true!"

Eugène looked in his face surprised. Then he smiled brightly, and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"It will come!" he exclaimed; "never doubt it for a moment. It will come! do you remember what I said to you of my skill in fortune-telling? I repeat, success is written in your face. What you really wish and strive to attain is as sure to arrive at last as a fair wind in the trades or a flood-tide at full moon."

"I hope so," returned the captain; "I believe it. I suppose I am as bold as my neighbours, and luckily it never comes across me when there's anything to do; but sometimes my heart fails when I think, if I should go down and lose my number, how she'll sit and wonder, poor thing, why I never come back!"

"Courage, my captain!" said Eugène cheerily, affecting the tone and manner of their old corps. "Courage. *En avant! à la mousquetaire!* You will lose nothing, not even the cargo; we shall return with both pockets full of money. You will buy a *château*. There will be a fête at your

[1] The progeny of a white and a quadroon, sometimes called an octoroon.

wedding: I shall bring there my violin, and, believe me, I shall rejoice in your happiness as if it were my own."

"She is so young, so beautiful, so gentle," continued the captain; "I could not bear that her life should be darkened, whatever comes of me. If, at last, the great happiness does arrive, Eugène, I shall not forget my friend. *Château* or cottage, you will be welcome with your violin. You would admire her as I do; we both think alike on so many subjects. So young, so fresh, so beautiful! I wish you could see her. I am not sure but that you *have* seen her. Do you remember the day?"—

What further confidences the skipper was about to impart were here cut short by a round of applause from the forecastle, apparently arising from some proposal much approved by the whole assemblage. The captain, with his friend, paused to listen. It was a request that Bottle-Jack would sing, and seemed not unfavourably received by that veteran. After many excuses, and much of a mock modesty to be observed under similar conditions in the most refined societies, he took his quid from his cheek, and cleared his voice with great pomp ere he embarked on a ditty of which the subject conveyed a delicate compliment to the proclivities of his friend Smoke-Jack, who had originated the call, and which he sang in that flat, monotonous, and dispiriting key, only to be accomplished, I firmly believe, by an able seaman in the daily exercise of his profession. He designated it "The Real Trinidado," and it ran as follows:—

"Oh! when I was a lad,
  Says my crusty old dad,
Says he,—'Jack! you must stick to the spade, oh!'
  But he grudged me my prog,
  And he grudged me my grog,
And my pipe of the real Trinidado.

  Says my Syoosan to me,—
  'Jack, if you goes to sea,
I'll be left but a desolate maid, oh!'
  Then I answers her—'Sue!
  Can't I come back to you
When I'm done with the old Trinidado?'

  So to sea we clears out,
  And the ship's head, no doubt,
Sou'-west and by sou' it was laid, oh!
  For the isles of the sun,
  Where there's fiddlers and fun,
And no end of the real Trinidado.

  Says our skipper, says he,
  'Be she close-hauled or free,

She'd behave herself in a tornado!'
  So he handles the ship
  With a canful of flip,
And a pipe of the real Trinidado.

  She's a weatherly craft,
  Werry wet, fore-and-aft,
And she rolls like a liquorish jade, oh!
  But she steers werry kind,
  On a course to her mind,
When she's bound for the isle Trinidado.

  Soon a sail we espies,
  Says the skipper—'My eyes!
That's the stuff for us lads of the trade, oh!
  Bales of silk in his hold,
  Casks of rum—maybe gold—
Not forgetting the real Trinidado!'

  Then it's 'Stand by! My sons!
  Steady! Run out your guns—
We've the Don's weather-gage. Who's afraid, oh!
  So we takes him aback,
  He is ours in a crack,
And we scuttles him off Trinidado!

  Now, here's to the crew!
  And the skipper! and Sue!
And here's 'Luck to the boys of the blade, oh!
  May they ne'er want a glass,
  A fair wind, a fair lass!
Nor a pipe of the real Trinidado!'"

The applause elicited by this effort was loud and long. Ere it subsided, George looked more than once anxiously to windward. Then he went to his cabin and consulted the barometer, after which he reappeared on deck and whispered in Eugène's ear—

"I am going to caulk it for an hour or two. Hold on, unless there's any change in the weather, and be sure you come below and rouse me out at eight bells."

CHAPTER XXVIII

DIRTY WEATHER

AT eight bells, the captain came on deck again, glancing once more somewhat anxiously astern. Not a cloud was to be seen in the moonlit sky, and the breeze that had blown so steadily, though so softly, for weeks, was sinking gradually, dying out, as it were, in a succession of gentle, peaceful sighs. Eugène, with the weather-wisdom of a man who had been but a few months at sea, rather inclined to think they might be becalmed. The crew did not trouble themselves about the matter. Every rag the brigantine could show was already set, and if a sail flapped idly against the mast, it soon drew again as before, to propel them smoothly on their course.

Moreover, a topic had been lately broached on the forecastle, of engrossing interest to every man before the mast. It affected no less delicate a subject than the beauty of the *Bashful Maid* herself, as typified by her figure-head. This work of art had unfortunately suffered a slight defacement in one of their late exploits, nearly the whole of its nose having been carried away by an untoward musket-shot. Such a loss had been replaced forthwith by the ship's carpenter, who supplied his idol with a far straighter, severer, and more classical feature than was ever yet beheld on the human countenance. Its proportions were proclaimed perfect by the whole crew; but though the artist's execution was universally approved, his florid style of colouring originated many conflicting opinions and much loud discussion on the first principles of imitative art. The carpenter was a man of decided ideas, and made large use of a certain red paint nearly approaching vermilion in his flesh tints. The *Bashful Maid's* nose, therefore, bloomed with a hue as rosy as her cheeks, and these, until toned down by wind and weather, had been an honest scarlet. None of the critics ventured to dispute the position that the carpenter's theory was sound. Slap-Jack, indeed, with a lively recollection of her wan face

when he took leave of his Alice, suggested that for his part he liked them "a little less gaudy about the gills"; but this heresy was ignominiously coughed down at once. It was merely a question as to whether the paint was, or was not, laid on a trifle too thick, and each man argued according to his own experience of the real human subject.

All the older hands (particularly Bottle-Jack, who protested vehemently that the figure-head of the *Bashful Maid*, so far from being a representation of feminine beauty, was in fact an elevated ideal of that seductive quality, a very model to be imitated, though hardly possible to be approached) were in favour of red noses, as adding warmth and expression to the female face. Their wives, their sweethearts, their sisters, their mothers, their grandmothers, all had red noses, and were careful to keep up the colouring by the use of comforting stimulants.

"What," said their principal speaker, "was the pints of a figur'-head, as laid down in the song? and no man on this deck was a-goin' to set up his opinion agin *that*, he should think! Wasn't 'em this here?—

'Eyes as black as sloes,
Cheeks like any rose.'

And if the song was payed out further, which it might or it might *not*, d'ye see, wouldn't the poet have naturally added—

'With a corresponding nose'?"

It was a telling argument, and although two or three of the foretop-men, smart young fellows, whose sweethearts had not yet taken to drinking, seemed disinclined to side with Slap-Jack, it ensured a triumphant majority, which ought to have set the question at rest, even without the conclusive opinion delivered by the negro.

"Snowball," said Bottle-Jack, "you've not told us your taste. Now you're impartial, you are, a-cause you can't belong to either side. What say ye, man? Red or white? Sing out and hoist your ensign!"

The black nodded, grinned, and voted—

"Iss! berry well," said he; "like 'em white berry well; like 'em red berry better!"

At this interesting juncture the men were a good deal surprised by an order from the captain to "turn all hands up and shorten sail." They rose from the deck, wondering and grumbling. Two or three, who had been sleeping below, came tumbling up with astonished faces and less willing steps

than usual. All seemed more or less discontented, and muttered to each other that "the skipper must be mad to shorten sail at midnight with a bright moon, and in a light breeze, falling every moment to a calm!" They went about the job somewhat unwillingly, and indeed were so much less ready than usual as to draw a good deal of animadversion from the deck, something in this style—

"Now, my lads, bear a hand, and look smart. Foretop there! What are you about with that foretopsail? Lower away on your after-halyards! Easy! Hoist on those fore-halyards, ye lubbers! Away with it, men! Altogether, and *with a will!* Why, you are going to sleep over it! I'd have done it smarter with the crew of a collier!"

To all which remonstrances, it is needless to say, the well-disciplined Slap-Jack made no reply; only once, finding a moment to look to windward from his elevated position as captain of the foretop, and observing a white mist-like scud low down on the horizon, he whispered quietly to his mate, then busied with a reef-knot—

"Blowed if he bain't right, arter all, Jem! We'll be under courses afore the sun's up. If we don't strike topmasts, they'll be struck for us, I shouldn't wonder. I see *him* once afore," explained Slap-Jack, jerking his head in the direction of the coming squall; "and he's a snorter, mate, that's about wot he is!"

The captain's precautions were not taken too soon. The topsails were hardly close reefed, all the canvas not absolutely required to steer the brigantine had been hardly taken in, ere the sky was darkened as if the moon had been suddenly snuffed out, and the squall was upon them. The *Bashful Maid* lay over, gunwale under, driving fiercely through the seething water, which had not yet risen to the heavy sea that was too surely coming. She plunged, she dived, she strained, she quivered like some living thing striving earnestly and patiently for its life. The rain hissed down in sheets, the lightning lit up the slippery deck, the dripping, pale-faced men, the bending spars, the straining tackle, and the few feet of canvas that must be carried at any price. In the quick-succeeding flashes every man on board could see that the others did their duty. From the captain, holding on by one hand, composed and cheerful, with his speaking-trumpet in the other, to the ship's boy, with his little bare feet and curling yellow hair, there was not a skulker amongst them! They remembered it long afterwards with honest pride, and the *Bashful Maid* behaved beautifully! Yes, in defiance of the

tempestuous squall, blowing as it seemed from all points of the compass at once; in defiance of crackling lightning, and thunder crashing overhead ere it rolled away all round the horizon, reverberating over the ocean for miles; in defiance of black darkness and lurid gleams, and drenching rain, and the cruel raging sea rising every moment and running like a mill-race, captain and crew were alike confident they would weather it, and they did.

But it was a sadly worn, and strained, and shattered craft that lay upon the fast subsiding water, some six hours after the squall, under the glowing sun of a morning in the tropics; a sun that glinted on the sea till its heaving surface looked all one sheet of burnished gold; a sun that was truly comforting to the drenched and wearied crew, although its glare exposed pitilessly the whole amount of damage the brigantine had sustained. That poor *Bashful Maid* was as different now from the trim yacht-like craft that sailed past the Needles, gaudy with paint and gleaming with varnish, as is the dead sea-bird, lying helpless and draggled on the wave, from the same creature soaring white and beautiful, in all its pride of power and plumage, against the summer sky.

There was but one opinion, however, amongst the crew as to the merits of the craft, and the way she had been handled. Not one of them, and it was a great acknowledgment for sailors to make, who never think their present berth the best —not one of them had ever before sailed in any description of vessel which answered her helm so readily or could lay her head so near the wind's eye—not one of them had ever seen a furious tropical squall weathered so scientifically and so successfully, nor could call to mind a captain who seemed so completely master of his trade. The three Jacks compared notes on the subject before turning in about sunrise, when the worst was indeed over, but the situation, to a landsman at least, would have yet appeared sufficiently precarious. The brigantine was still driving before a heavy sea, showing just so much canvas as should save her from being becalmed in its trough, overtaken and buried under the pursuing enemy. The gale was still blowing with a fury that offered the best chance of its force soon becoming exhausted, and two men were at the helm under the immediate supervision of the skipper himself. Nevertheless, the three stout tars betook themselves to their berth without the slightest anxiety, well aware that each would be sleeping like a child almost before he could clamber into his hammock. But while he took off

and wrung his dripping sea-coat, Bottle-Jack observed sententiously to his mates—

"Captain Kidd could fight a ship, my sons, and Captain Kidd could sail a ship. Now if you asks my opinion, it's this here—In such a squall as we've a-weathered, or pretty nigh a-weathered, Captain Kidd, he'd a-run afore it at once, an' he'd a bin in it now. This here young skipper, he laid to, so long as she *could* lay to, an' he never run till he couldn't fight no more. That's why he'll be out on it afore the middle watch. Belay now, I'm a-goin' to caulk it for a spell."

Neither Smoke-Jack nor Slap-Jack were in a humour for discussion, and each cheerfully conceded the captain's judicious seamanship, Smoke-Jack expressing his opinion that nothing in the King's navy could touch the brigantine, and Slap-Jack recurring to his previous experience, rejoicing that he no longer sailed under the gallant but unseamanlike Captain Delaval.

The honest fellows, thoroughly wearied, were soon in the land of dreams. Haunted no more by visions of dancing spars, wet slippery ropes, yards dipping in the waves, and flapping sails struggling wildly for the freedom that must be their own destruction, and the whole ship's company's doom. No, their thoughts were of warm sanded parlours, cheerful coal-fires, endless pipes of tobacco, messmates singing, women dancing, the unrestrained festivities and flowing ale-jugs of the Fox and Fiddle. Perhaps, to the imagination of the youngest, a fair pale face, loving and tearful, stood out from all these jovial surroundings, and Slap-Jack felt a purer and a better man while, though but in imagination, he clasped his true and tender Alice to his heart once more.

CHAPTER XXIX

PORT WELCOME

IT was a refreshing sight to behold Slap-Jack, "rigged," as he was pleased to term it, "to the nines," in the extreme of sea-dandyism, enacting the favourite part of a "liberty-man" ashore. Nothing had been left undone for the brilliancy of his exterior that could be achieved by scrubbing, white linen, and robust health. The smart young captain of the foretop seemed to glow and sparkle in the vertical sun, as he stood on the quay of Port Welcome, and cast a final glance of professional approval on the yards he had lately squared to a nicety and the trim of such gear and tackle aloft as seemed his own especial pride and care.

The *Bashful Maid*, after all the buffetings she had sustained, particularly from the late squall, having made her port in one of the smallest and most beautiful of the West India islands, now lay at anchor, fair and motionless, like a living thing sleeping on the glistening sea. It yet wanted some hours of noon, nevertheless the sun had attained a power that seemed to bake the very stones on the quay, and warmed the clear limpid water fathom deep. Even Slap-Jack protested against the heat, as he lounged and rolled into the town, to find it swarming with negroes of both sexes, sparingly clothed, but with such garments as they did wear glowing in the gaudiest colours, and carrying on their hard, woolly heads baskets containing eggs, kids, poultry, fruit, vegetables, and every kind of market produce in the island. That island was indeed one of those jewels of the Caribbean Sea to which no description can do justice.

For the men left on board the *Bashful Maid*, now heaving drowsily at her anchor, it realised, with its vivid and varied

hues, its fantastic outlines, its massive brakes, its feathery palms, its luxuriant redundancy of vegetation, trailing and drooping to the sparkling water's-edge, a sailor's idea of Paradise; while for the three Jacks rolling into the little town of Port Welcome, with its white houses, straggling streets, frequent drinking-shops, and swarming population—black, white, and coloured, it represented the desirable haven of Fiddler's Green, where they felt, no doubt, they had arrived before their time. Slap-Jack made a remark to that effect, which was cordially endorsed by his comrades as they turned into the main thoroughfare of the town, and agreed that, in order to enjoy their holiday to the utmost, it was essential to commence with something to drink all round.

Now, the *Bashful Maid* having been already a few days in port, had in that time disposed of a considerable portion of her cargo, and such an event as the arrival of a saucy brigantine, combining the attractions of a man-of-war with the advantages of a free-trader, not being an everyday occurrence among the population of Port Welcome, much stir, excitement, and increase of business was the result. The French storekeepers bid eagerly for wares of European manufacture, the French planters sent their slaves down in dozens to purchase luxuries only attainable from beyond sea, while the negroes, grinning from ear to ear, jostled and scolded each other in their desire to barter yams, plantains, fruit, poultry, and even, on occasion, pieces of actual money, for scarfs, gloves, perfumes, and ornaments — the tawdrier the better, which they thought might add to the gloss of their black skins, and set off their quaint, honest, ugly black faces to advantage.

Here and there, too, a Carib, one of the aboriginal lords of the island, distinguished by his bronze colour, his grave demeanour—so unlike the African, and his disfigured nose, artificially flattened from infancy, would stalk solemnly away, rich in the possession of a few glass beads or a bit of tinsel, for which he had bartered all his worldly wealth, and which, like more civilised people, he valued, not at its intrinsic worth, but at its cost price. The three Jacks observed the novelties which surrounded them from different points of view according to their different characters, yet with a cool imperturbable demeanour essentially professional. To men of their calling, nothing ever appears extraordinary. They see so many strange sights in different countries, and have so little time to become acquainted with the wonders they behold, that they soon acquire a profound and philosophical indifference

to everything beyond their ordinary range of experience, persuaded that the astonishment of to-day is pretty sure to be exceeded by the astonishment of to-morrow. Neither can they easily discover anything perfectly and entirely new, having usually witnessed something of the same kind before, or heard it circumstantially described at considerable length by a messmate; so that a seaman is but little impressed with the sight of a foreign town, of which, indeed, he acquires in an hour or two a knowledge not much more superficial than he has of his native village.

Bottle-Jack was in the habit of giving his opinion, as he expressed it, "free." That it was complimentary to Port Welcome, his comrades gathered from the following sentiment:—

"I'm a-gettin' strained and weather-worn," observed the old seaman impressively, "and uncommon dry besides. Tell ye what it is, mates—one more cruise, and blowed if I won't just drop my anchor here, and ride out the rest of my time all snug at my moorings."

Smoke-Jack turned his quid with an expression of intense disgust.

"And get spliced to a nigger, old man!" said he argumentatively. "Never go for to say it! I'm not a-goin' to dispute as this here's a tidy bit of a island enough, and safe anchorage. Likewise, as I've been told by them as tried it, plenty to drink, and good. Nor I won't say but what a craft might put in here for a spell to refit, do a bit of caulking, and what not. But for dry-dock, mate, never go for to say it. Why you couldn't get anything like a decent missis, man, hereaway; an' think o' the price o' beer!"

"Regardin' a missis," returned the other reflectively, "'tain't the craft wot crowds the most canvas as makes the best weather, mate, and at my years a man looks less to raking masts an' a gay figur'-head than to good tonnage and wholesome breadth of beam. Now, look ye here, mates—wot say ye to this here craft?—her with the red ensign at the main, as is layin' to, like, with her fore-sheet to windward and her helm one turn down?"

While he spoke, he pointed to our old acquaintance, Célandine, who was cheapening fancy articles at a store that spread its goods out under an awning far into the middle of the modest street. The quadroon was, as usual, gorgeously dressed, wearing the scarlet turban that covered her still black hair majestically, as a queen carries her diadem. Like the coloured race in general, she seemed to have renewed her

youth under a tropical sun, and at a short distance, particularly in the eyes of Bottle-Jack, appeared a fine-looking woman, with pretensions to the remains of beauty still.

The three seamen, of course, ranged up alongside for careful criticism, but Célandine's attention was by no means to be distracted from the delightful business of shopping she had on hand. Shawls, scarfs, fans, gloves, tawdry jewels, and perfumery, lay heaped in dazzling profusion on a shelf before her, and the African blood danced in her veins with childish glee at the tempting sight. The storekeeper, a French Creole, with sharp features, sallow complexion, and restless, down-looking black eyes, taking advantage of her eagerness, asked three times its value for every article he pointed out; but Célandine, though profuse, was not inexperienced, and dearly loved, moreover, the feminine amusement of driving a bargain. Much expostulation therefore, contradiction, wrangling, and confusion of tongues was the result. The encounter seemed at the warmest, and the French Creole, notwithstanding his villainous countenance and unscrupulous assertions, was decidedly getting the worst of it, when Slap-Jack's quick eye detected amongst the wares exposed for sale certain silks and other stuffs which had formed part of the *Bashful Maid's* cargo, and had, indeed, been wrested by the strong hand from a Portuguese trader, after a brisk chase and a running fight, which cost the brigantine a portion of her boltsprit and two of her smartest hands. The chest containing these articles had been started in unloading, so that its contents had sustained much damage from sea-water. It was a breadth of stained satin out of this very consignment that the Creole storekeeper now endeavoured to persuade Célandine she would do well to purchase at an exorbitant valuation.

Slap-Jack, like many of his calling, had picked up a smattering of negro-French, and could understand the subject of dispute sufficiently to interfere, a course from which he was not to be dissuaded by his less impressionable companions.

"Let her be!" growled Smoke-Jack. "Wot call have *you* now to come athwart-hawse of that there jabbering mounseer, as a man might say, dredging in his own fishing-ground? It's no use hailing her, I tell ye, mate, I knows the trim on 'em; maybe she'll lay her foresail aback, and stand off-and-on till sundown, then just when a man least expects it, she'll up stick, shake out every rag of canvas, and run for port. Bless ye, young and old, fair and foul, black, white, and coloured, nigger, quadroon, and mustee—I knows 'em all, and

not one on 'em but carries a weather-helm in a fresh breeze, and steers wild and wilful in a sea-way."

But Slap-Jack was not to be diverted from his purpose. With considerable impudence, and an impressive sea-bow, he walked up to Célandine under the eyes of his admiring shipmates, and, mustering the best negro-French at his command, warned her in somewhat incomprehensible jargon of the imposition intended to be practised. Now it happened that Port Welcome, and the island in which it was situated, had been occupied in its varying fortunes by French, Spaniards, and English so equally, that these languages, much corrupted by negro pronunciation, were spoken indiscriminately, and often altogether. It was a great relief, therefore, to Slap-Jack that Célandine thanked him politely for his interposition in his native tongue, and when she looked into the young foretopman's comely brown face, she found herself so fascinated with something she detected there as to continue the conversation in tolerably correct English, for the purpose of improving their acquaintance. The seaman congratulated himself on having made so happy a discovery, while his friends looked on in mute admiration of the celerity with which he had completed his conquest.

"He's a smart chap, mate," enunciated Bottle-Jack, with a glance of intense approval at the two figures receding up the sunny street, as Célandine marched their companion off, avowedly for the purpose of refreshing him with cooling drinks in return for his good-nature—"a smart young chap, and can hold his own with the best of 'em as ever hoisted a petticoat, silk or dowlas. See now, that's the way to do it in these here latitudes! First he hails 'em, speaking up like a man, then he ranges alongside, and gets the grapplers out, and so tows his prize into port in a pig's whisper. He's a smart young chap, I tell ye, and a match for the sauciest craft as ever sailed under false colours, and hoisted a red pennant at the main."

But Smoke-Jack shook his head, and led his shipmate, nothing loth, into a tempting store-house, redolent with the fragrance of limes, tobacco, decaying melons, and Jamaica rum. He said nothing, however, until he had quenched his thirst; then after a vigorous pull at a tall beaker, filled with a fragrant compound in which neither ice nor alcohol had been forgotten, observed, as if the subject still occupied his thoughts—

"I knows the trim on 'em, I tell ye; I knows the trim on 'em. As I says to the young chap now, I never found one yet as would steer kind in a sea-way."

Meanwhile, Célandine, moved by an impulse for which she could not account, or perhaps dreading to analyse a sentiment that might after all be founded on a fallacy, led the young seaman into a cool, quiet room in a wooden house, on the shady side of the street, of which the apparent mistress was a large bustling negress, with a numerous family of jet-black children, swarming and crawling about the floor like garden-snails after a shower. This proprietress seemed to hold the quadroon in considerable awe, and was delighted to bring the best her house afforded for the entertainment of such visitors. Slap-Jack, accommodated with a deep measure of iced rum-and-water, lit his pipe, played with the children, stared at his black hostess in unmitigated astonishment, and prepared himself to answer the questions it was obvious the quadroon was burning to put.

Célandine hovered restlessly about the room, fixing her bright black eyes upon the seaman with an eager, inquiring glance, that she withdrew hastily when she thought herself observed, and thereby driving into a state of abject terror the large sable hostess, whose pity for the victim, as she believed him, at last overcame her fear of the quadroon, and impelled her to whisper in Slap-Jack's ear—

"Obi-woman! *bruxa*,[1] buckra-massa, *bruxa! Mefiez-vous!—Ojo-malo.*[2] No drinkee for drunkee! Look out! *Gare!*" A warning utterly incomprehensible to its object, who winked at her calmly over his tumbler, while he drank with exceeding relish the friendly mother's health, and that of her thriving black progeny.

There is nothing like a woman's tact to wind the secrets out of a man's bosom, gradually, insensibly, and by much the same smooth, delicate process as the spinning of flax off a distaff. With a few observations rather than questions, a few allusions artfully put, Célandine drew from Slap-Jack an account of his early years, and an explanation, offered with a certain pride, of the manner in which he became a seaman. When he told her how he had made his escape while a mere child from his protector, whom he described as "the chap wot wanted to bind him 'prentice to a sawbones," he was startled to see the quadroon's shining black eyes full of tears. He consoled her in his own rough, good-humoured way.

"What odds did it make after all," argued Slap-Jack, helping himself liberally to the rum-and-water, "when I was out of my bed by sunrise and down to the waterside to get

[1] A witch. [2] Evil eye.

aboard-ship in the British Channel, hours afore he was up, and so Westward-ho! and away? Don't ye take on about it. A sailor I would be, and a sailor I *am*. You ask the skipper if I'm not. He knows my rating I should think, and whether I'm worth my salt or no. Don't ye take on so, mother, I say!"

But the quadroon was weeping without concealment now.

"Call me that again!" she exclaimed, sobbing convulsively. "Call me that again! I have not been called mother for so long. Hush!" she added, starting up, and laying her hand forcibly on his lips. "Not another word. Fool! Idiot that I am! Not another word. She can hear us. She can understand;" and Célandine darted a furious glance at the busy negress, which caused that poor woman to shake like a jelly down to her misshapen black heels.

Slap-Jack felt considerably puzzled. His private opinion, as he afterwards confided to his messmates, was, that the old lady not being drunk, must be mad—a cheerful view, which was indeed confirmed by what occurred immediately afterwards. In struggling to keep her hand upon his mouth, she had turned back the deep, open collar of his blue shirt till his brawny neck was exposed nearly to the shoulder. Espying on that neck a certain white mark, contrasting with the ruddy weather-browned skin, she gave a half-stifled shriek, like that with which a dumb animal expresses its rapture of recognition; and taking the man's head in her arms, pressed it to her bosom, rocking herself to and fro, while she wept and murmured over him with an inexplicable tenderness, by which he was at once astonished and alarmed. For a few moments, and while the negress's back was turned, she held him tight, but released him when the other re-entered the room, exacting from him a solemn promise that he would meet her again at an indicated place, and adding that she would then confide to him matters in which, like herself, he was deeply interested, but which must be kept religiously secret so long as he remained in the island.

Slap-Jack, after he had finished his rum-and-water, rejoined his comrades, a more thoughtful man than he had left them. To their jests and inquiries he returned vague and inconclusive answers, causing Bottle-Jack to stare at him in solemn wonder, and affording Smoke-Jack another illustration of his theory as to the wilfulness of feminine steerage in a sea-way. Célandine, on the contrary, walked through the town with the jaunty step and bright vigilant eye of one who has discovered some treasure that must be guarded with a

care proportioned to its value. She bought no more trinkets from the storekeepers now, she loitered no more to gossip with sallow, white, or shining negro, or dandy coloured man. At intervals her brow indeed clouded over, and the scowl of which it was so capable deepened ominously, while she clenched her hands and set her teeth; but the frown soon cleared away, and she smiled bright and comely once more.

She had found her boy at last. Her first-born, the image of her first love. Her heart warmed to him from the very moment he came near her at the store. She was sure of it long before she recognised the mark on his neck—the same white mark she had kissed a thousand times, when he danced and crowed on her knees. It was joy, it was triumph. But she must be very silent, very cautious. If it was hard that a mother might not openly claim her son, it would be harder still that such acknowledgment should rivet on him the yoke of a slavery to which he was born by that mother, herself a slave.

CHAPTER XXX

MONTMIRAIL WEST

AT a distance of less than a league from Port Welcome stood the large and flourishing plantation of Cash-a-crou, known to the European population, and, indeed, to many of the negroes, by the more civilised appellation of Montmirail West. It was the richest and most important establishment on the island, covering a large extent of cultivation, reclaimed at no small cost of labour from the bush, and worked by a numerous gang of slaves. Not a negro was purchased for these grounds till he had undergone a close inspection by the shrewd and pitiless overseer, who never missed a good investment, be it Coromantee, Guinea-man, or Congo, and never bought a hand, of however plausible an appearance, in whom his quick eye could detect a flaw; consequently, no such cheerful faces, fresh lips, sound teeth, strong necks, open chests, sinewy arms, dry, large hands, flat stomachs, powerful loins, round thighs, muscular calves, lean ankles, high feet, and similar physical points of servile symmetry, were to be found in any other gang as in that which worked the wide clearings on the Cash-a-crou estate, which, for convenience, we will call by its more civilised name. It was said, however, that in the purchase of female negroes this overseer was not so particular; that a saucy eye, a nimble tongue, and such an amount of good looks as is compatible with African colouring and features, found more favour in his judgment than size, strength, substance, vigorous health, or the prolific qualities so desirable in these investments. The overseer, indeed, was a married man, living, it was thought, in wholesome dread of his quadroon wife, and so completely did he identify himself with the new character he had assumed, that even Célandine could hardly believe her present husband was the same Stefano Bartoletti who had wooed her unsuccessfully in her girlhood, had met her again under such strange circumstances in France, eventually to follow her fortunes, and those of her mistress, the

marquise, and obtain from that lady the supervision of her negroes on the estate she had inherited by her mother's will, which she chose to call Montmirail West.

Bartoletti had intended to settle down for the rest of his life in a state of dignified indolence with Célandine. He had even offered to purchase the quadroon's freedom, which was generously given to her by the marquise with that view; but he had accustomed himself through the whole of his early life to the engrossing occupation of money-making, and like many others he found it impossible to leave off. He and his wife now devoted themselves entirely to the acquisition of wealth; she with the object of discovering her long-lost son, he, partly from inborn covetousness, and yet more from the force of habit. Quick, shrewd, and indeed enterprising, where there was no personal risk, he had been but a short time in the service of the marquise ere he became an excellent overseer, by no means neglecting her interests, while he was scrupulously attentive to his own. The large dealings in human merchandise which now occupied his attention afforded scope for his peculiar qualities, and Signor Bartoletti found few competitors in the slave-market who, in caution, cupidity, and knowledge of business, could pretend to be his equals. Moreover, he dearly loved the constant speculation, amounting to actual gambling, inseparable from such transactions, nor was he averse, besides, to that pleasing sensation of superiority experienced by all but the noblest natures from absolute authority, however unjustifiable, over their fellow-creatures.

The signor was a great man in the plantation, a great man in Port Welcome, a great man on the deck of a trader just arrived with her swarthy cargo from the Bight of Benin or the Gold Coast; but his proportions seemed to shrink and his step to falter when he crossed the threshold of his own home. The older negroes, who knew he had married an Obi-woman, and respected him for his daring, were persuaded that he had been quelled and brought into subjection through some charm put upon him by Célandine. To the same magical influence they attributed the quadroon's favour with her mistress, and this superstitious dread had indeed been of service to both; for a strong feeling of dissatisfaction was gaining ground rapidly amongst the blacks, and then, as now, notwithstanding all that has been said and written in their favour, they were less easily ruled by love than fear.

It is not that they are naturally savage, inhuman, brutal. Centuries of Christianity and cultivation might probably

have done for the black man what they have done for the white; but those centuries have been denied him; and if he is to be taken at once from a state of utter ignorance and degradation to be placed on a footing of social equality with those who have hitherto been his masters—a race that has passed gradually through the successive stages he is expected to compass in one stride—surely it must be necessary to restrain him from the excesses peculiar to the lusty adolescence of nations, as of individuals, by some stronger repressive influence than need be applied to the staid and sober demeanour of a people arrived long ago at maturity, if not already past their prime.

Signor Bartoletti did not trouble himself with such speculations. Intimidation he found answered his purpose tolerably—corporal punishment extremely well. Passing from the supervision of some five-score hoes, picking their labour out with great deliberation amongst the clefts and ridges of a half-cleared mountain, clothed to its summit in a tangle of luxuriant beauty, he threaded a line of wattled mud cottages, cool with thick heavy thatch, dazzling in whitewash, and interspersed with fragrant almond-trees, breaking the scorching sunlight into a thousand shimmering rays, as they rustled and quivered to the whisper of the land-breeze, not yet exhausted by the heat. At the door of one of these huts he spied a comely negro girl, whose duties should have kept her in the kitchen of the great house. He also observed that she concealed something bulky under her snowy apron, and looked stealthily about as if afraid of being seen. He had a step noiseless and sure as a cat; she never heard him coming, but started with a loud scream when she felt his hand on her shoulder, and incontinently began to cry.

"What have you got there, Fleurette?" asked the overseer sternly. "Bring it out at once, and show it up!"

"Nothing, massa," answered Fleurette, of course, though she was sobbing all the time. "It only aunt Rosalie's piccaninny. I take him in please, just now, to his mammy, out of the wind."

There was but such a light breath of air as kept the temperature below actual suffocation.

"Wind! nonsense!" exclaimed Bartoletti, perspiring and exasperated. "Aunt Rosalie's child was in the baby-yard half an hour ago; here, let me look at him!" and the overseer snatched up Fleurette's apron to discover a pair of plump black hands, clasped over a well-fattened turkey, cleaned, plucked, and ready for the pot.

The girl laughed through her tears.

"You funny man, signor!" said she archly, yet with a gleam of alarm in her wild black eyes; "you no believe only when you see. Piccaninny gone in wash-tub long since; Fleurette talkee trash, trash; dis lilly turkey fed on plantation at Maria Galante; good father give um to Fleurette a-cause dis nigger say 'Ave' right through, and spit—*so*—at Mumbo-Jumbo."

This story was less credible than the last, inasmuch as the adjoining plantation of Maria Galante, cultivated by a few Jesuit priests, although in a thriving condition, and capable of producing the finest poultry reared, was more than an hour's walk from where they stood, and it was impossible that Fleurette could have been absent so long from her duties at that period of the day. So Bartoletti, placing his hand in his waistcoat, pulled out a certain roll, which the slaves called his black book, and inserted Fleurette's name therein for corporal punishment to the amount of stripes awarded for the crime of theft.

It was a common action enough; scarce a day passed, scarce even an hour, without the production of this black book by the overseer, and a torrent of entreaties, couched in the mingled jargon of French, Spanish, and British, I have endeavoured to render through the conventional negro-English, which, indeed, formed its basis, from the unfortunate culprit whose name was thus inscribed; but on this occasion Fleurette seemed to entertain a morbid terror of the ordeal quite out of proportion to its frequency, and, indeed, its severity—for though sufficiently brutal, the lash was not dangerous to life or limb. She screamed, she wept, she prayed, she caught the overseer by his knees and clasped them to her bosom, entreating him, with a frantic earnestness that became almost sublime, to spare her this degradation! to forgive her only this once! to bid her work night and day till crop-time, and then to send her into the field-gang for the hardest labour they could devise—nay, to sell her to the first trader that touched at Port Welcome, never to look on her home at Cash-a-crou again—anything, anything, rather than tie her to a stake and flog her like a disobedient hound!

But Bartoletti was far too practised an overseer to be in the slightest degree moved by such entreaties. Replacing the black book in his waistcoat, he walked coolly away, without deigning to look back at his despairing suppliant, writhing under such a mixture of grief and shame as soon maddened into rage. Perhaps, had he done so, he would

have been frightened into mercy, for a bolder man than the Italian might have been cowed by the glare of that girl's eyes, when she drew up her slender figure, and clenching her hands till the nails pierced them, spat after him with an intensity of hatred that wanted only opportunity to slake its fierce desire in blood.

The signor, however, wiping his brow, unconscious, passed quietly on, to report his morning's work to the marquise, and obtain her sanction for Fleurette's punishment, because the mistress never permitted any slave on her estate to be chastised but by her own express command.

Long years ago, when his heart was fresh and high, the Italian had spent a few months in this very island, a period to which he still looked back as to the one bright ray that gilded his dreary, wandering, selfish life. It was here he met Célandine while both were young, and wooed her with little encouragement indeed, for she confessed honestly enough that he was too late, yet not entirely without hope. And now in gleams between the cane-pieces he could catch a glimpse of that silver-spread lagoon by which they had walked more than once in the glowing evenings, till darkness, closing without warning like a curtain, found them together still. He had conceived for himself then an ideal of Paradise which had never in after years faded completely away. To win the quadroon for his own—to make himself a peaceful home in easy circumstances, somewhere amidst this tangled wilderness of beauty from which Port Welcome peeped out on the Caribbean Sea—to sit in his own porch and watch the tropical sunset dying off through its blended hues of gold, and crimson, and orange, into the pale, serene depths of opal, lost ere he could look again, amongst the gathering shades of night—such were his dreams, and at last he had realised them to the letter; but he never watched the sunset now, nor walked by the cool glistening lagoon with the woman whom in his own selfish way he had loved for half a lifetime. She was his wife, you see, and a very imperious wife she proved. When he had leisure to speculate on such matters, which was seldom, he could not but allow that he was disappointed; that the ideal was a fallacy, the romance a fiction, the investment a failure; practically, the home was dull, the lagoon damp, and the sunset moonshine!

Therefore, as he walked on, though the material Paradise was there, as it had always been, he never wasted a look or thought on its glowing beauties, intent only on the dust that covered his shoes, the thirst that fired his throat and the

perspiration that streamed from his brow. Yet palm, cocoa, orange, and lime tree were waving overhead; while the wild vine, pink, purple, and delicate creamy-white, winding here about his path, ran fifty feet aloft round some bare stem to which it clung in a succession of convolvulus-like blossoms from the same plant he trod beneath his very feet. Birds of gaudy feather—purple, green, and flaming scarlet, flashed from tree to tree with harsh, discordant cries, and a *louis d'or* flitted round him in its bright, golden plumage, looking, as its name implies, like a guinea upon wings. The grass-grown road he followed was indeed an avenue to the great house, and as he neared his destination he passed another glimpse of tropical scenery without a glance. It was the same view that delighted the eyes of the marquise daily from her sitting-room, and that Cerise would look at in quiet enjoyment for hours.

A slope of vivid green, dotted with almond-trees, stretched away from the long, low, white building to a broad, clear river, shining between the plantains and bananas that clothed its banks; beyond these, cattle pasture and cane-pieces shot upward in variegated stripes through the tangled jungle of the steep ascent, while at short intervals hog-plum, or other tall trees of the forest, reared their heads against the cloudless sky, to break the dark thick mass that clothed the mountain to its very summit—save where some open, natural savannah, with its crop of tall, rank, feathering grass, relieved the eye from the vivid colouring and gaudy exuberance of beauty in which nature dresses these West Indian islands.

Bartoletti knew well that he should find the marquise in her sitting-room, for the sun was still high and the heat intense; none therefore but slaves, slave-drivers, or overseers would be abroad for hours. The signor had, however, been reduced to such proper subjection by Célandine that he never ventured to approach the marquise without making a previous report to his wife, and as the quadroon had not yet returned from the visit to Port Welcome, in which she made acquaintance with Slap-Jack, some considerable delay took place before the enormity of Fleurette's peculations could be communicated to her mistress.

Mother and daughter were inseparable here, in the glowing tropical heat, as under the cool breezes and smiling skies of their own beautiful France, a land to which they constantly reverted with a longing that seemed only to grow more and more intense as every hour of their unwelcome banishment dragged by. They were sitting in a large low room, with

the smallest possible amount of furniture and the greatest attainable of air. To ensure a thorough draught, the apartment occupied the whole breadth of the house, and the windows, scarcely closed from year's-end to year's-end, were placed opposite each other, so that there was free ingress on all sides for the breeze that, notwithstanding the burning heat of the climate, blows pretty regularly in these islands from morning till night and from night till morning. It wafted through the whole apartment the fragrance of a large granadilla, cut in half for the purpose, that stood surrounded by a few shaddocks, limes, and pomegranates, heaped together like a *cornucopia* on a small table in the corner; it fluttered the leaves of a book that lay on Mademoiselle de Montmirail's knee, who was pretending to read, with her eyes resting wearily on a streak of blue sea, far off between the mountains; and it lifted the dark hair from the temples of the marquise, fanning with grateful breath, yet scarce cooling, the rich crimson of her cheek.

The resemblance between these two grew closer day by day. While the mother remained stationary at that point of womanly beauty to which the daughter was approaching, figure and face, in each, became more and more alike; and though the type of the elder was still the richer and more glowing, of the younger, the more delicate and classical, Cerise seemed unaccountably to have gained some of that spirit and vitality which the marquise seemed as unaccountably to have lost. Also on the countenance of each might be traced the same expression—the longing, wistful look of those who live in some world of their own, out of and far beyond the present, saddened in the woman's face with memory as it was brightened in the girl's by hope.

"It is suffocating!" exclaimed the marquise, rising restlessly from her seat, and pushing the hair off her temples with a gesture of impatience. "Cerise, my darling, are you made of stone that you do not cry out at this insupportable heat? It irritates me to see you sit reading there as calmly as if you could feel the wind blowing off the heights of Montmartre in January. It seems as if the sun would never go down in this oven that they call an island."

Cerise shut her book and collected her scattered ideas with an obvious effort.

"I read, mamma," she answered, smiling, "because it is less fatiguing than to think, but I obtain as little result from the one process as the other. Do you know, I begin to believe the stories we used to hear in Paris about the West

Indies, and I am persuaded that we shall not only be shrivelled up to mummies in a few more weeks, but that our tongues will be so dry and cracked as to be incapable of expressing our thoughts, even if our poor addled brains could form them. Look at Pierrot even, who is a native; he has not said a syllable since breakfast."

Pierrot, however, like the historical parrot of all ages, though silent on the present occasion, doubtless thought the more, for the attitude in which he held his head on one side, peering at his young mistress with shrewd unwinking eye, implied perceptions more than human, nay, even diabolical in their malignant sagacity.

"What can I do?" said the marquise vehemently, pacing the long room with quick steps ill suited to the temperature and the occasion. "While the Regent lives I can never return to Paris. For myself, I sometimes fancy I could risk it; but when I think of you, Cerise—I dare not—I *dare* not; that's the truth. An insult, an injury, he might forgive, or at least forget; but a scene in which he enacted the part of the *Pantaleone*, whom everybody kicks and cuffs; in which he was discovered as a coxcomb, an intruder, and a *polisson*, and through the whole of which he is conscious, moreover, that he was intensely ridiculous—I protest to you I cannot conceive any outrage so horrible as to satisfy his revenge. No, my child, for generations my family have served the Bourbons, and we should know what they are: with all their good qualities there are certain offences they can never forgive, and this Regent is the worst of the line."

"Then, mamma," observed Cerise cheerfully, though she smothered a sigh, "we must have patience and live where we are. It might be worse," she added, pointing to the streak of deep-blue sea that belted the horizon. "This is a wider view and a fairer than the dead wall of Vincennes or the gratings of the Bastile, and some day, perhaps, some of our friends from France may drop in quite unexpectedly to offer their homage to madame la marquise. How the dear old prince-marshal would gasp in this climate, and how dreadfully he would swear at the lizards, centipedes, galley-wasps, red ants, and cockroaches! He who, brave as he is, never dared face a spider or an earwig! Mamma, I think if I could see his face over a borer-worm, I should have one more good laugh, even in such a heat as this."

"You might laugh, my dear," answered her mother, "but I think I should be more inclined to cry—yes, to cry for sheer joy at seeing him again. I grant you he was a little

ridiculous; but what courage! what sincerity! what a true gentleman! I hear that he too is out of favour at the Palais Royal, and has returned to his estates at Château-Guerrand. His coach was seen near the Hôtel Montmirail the night of monsieur le duc's discreditable *escapade*, and that is crime enough, I conclude, to balance a dozen battles and forty years of loyal service to the throne. No, Cerise, I tell you while the monster lives we must remain exiled in this purgatory of fire. But my friends keep me well informed of passing events. I hear his health is failing. They tell me his face is purple now in the mornings when he comes to Council, and he drinks harder than ever with his roués at night. Of course, my child, it would be wicked to wish for the death of a fellow-creature, but while there is a Regent in France you and I must be content with the lizards and the cockroaches for society, and for amusement, the supervision of these miserable, brutalised negro slaves."

"Poor things!" said the younger lady tenderly. "I am sure they have kind hearts under their black skins. I cannot but think that if they were taught and encouraged, and treated less like beasts of burden, they would show as much intelligence as our own peasants at La Fierté or the *real* Montmirail. Why, Fleurette brought me a bouquet of jessamines and tuberoses yesterday, with a compliment to the paleness of my complexion that could not have been outdone by Count Point d'Appui himself. Oh! mamma, I wish you would let me establish *my* civil code for the municipal government of the blacks."

"You had better let it alone, my child," answered the marquise gravely. "Wiser brains than yours have puzzled over the problem, and failed to solve it. I have obtained all the information in my power from those whose experience is reliable, and considered it for myself besides, till my head ached. It seems to me that young colonists, and all who know nothing about negroes, are for encouragement and indulgence; old planters, and those who are well acquainted with their nature, for severity and repression. I would not be cruel,—far from it; but as for treating them like white people, Cerise, in my opinion all such liberality is sheer nonsense. Jaques and Pierre, at home, are ill-fed, ill-clothed (I wish it were not so), up early, down late, and working often without intermission from sunrise till sunset; nevertheless, Jaques or Pierre will doff his red cap, tuck up his blouse, and run a league bareheaded, after a hard day's work, if you or I lift up a finger; and why?—because we

are La Fiertés or Montmirails. But Hippolyte or Achille, fat, strong, lazy, well-fed, grumbles if he is bid to carry a message to the boiling-house after his eight hours' labour, and only obeys because he knows that Bartoletti can order him a hundred lashes by my authority at his discretion."

"I do not like the Italian, mamma! I am sure that man is not to be trusted," observed Cerise inconsequently, being a young lady. "What could make my dear old *bonne* marry him, I have never been able to discover. He is an alchemist, you know, and a conjurer, and worse. I shudder to think of the stories they told about him at home, and I believe he bewitched her!"

Here Mademoiselle de Montmirail crossed herself devoutly, and her mother laughed.

"He is a very good overseer," said she, "and as for his necromancy, even if he learned it from the Prince of Darkness, which you seem to believe, I fancy Célandine would prove a match for his master. Between them, the signor, as he calls himself, and his wife, manage my people wonderfully well, and this is no easy matter at present, for I am sorry to say they show a good deal of insubordination and ill-will. There is a spirit of disaffection amongst them," added the marquise, setting her red lips firmly together, "that must be kept down with the strong hand. I do not mind your going about amongst the house negroes, Cerise, or noticing the little children, though taking anything black on your lap is, in my opinion, an injudicious piece of condescension; but I would not have you be seen near the field-gang at present, men or women, and above all, never trust them. Not one is to be depended on except Célandine, for I believe they hate her as much as her husband, and fear her a great deal more."

The marquise had indeed cause for uneasiness as to the condition of her plantation, although she had never before hinted so much to her daughter, and indeed, like the generality of people who live on the crust of a volcano, she forced herself to ignore the danger of which she was yet uncomfortably conscious. For some time, perhaps ever since the arrival of the Italian overseer, there had been symptoms of discontent and disaffection among the slaves. The work indeed went on as usual, for Bartoletti was unsparing of the lash, but scarce a week passed without a runaway betaking himself to the bush, and vague threats, forerunners of some serious outbreak, had been heard from the idlest and most mutinous of the gang when under punishment. It would not have been well in

such difficulties to relax the bonds of discipline, yet it was scarcely wise to draw them tighter than before. The marquise, however, came of a race that had never yet learned to yield, and to which, for generations, the assertion of his rights by an inferior had seemed an intolerable presumption that must be resisted to the death. As her slaves, therefore, grew more defiant she became more severe, and of late the slightest offences had been visited with the utmost rigour, and under no circumstances passed over without punishment. It was an unfortunate time therefore that poor Fleurette had chosen to be detected in the abstraction of a turkey ready plucked for cooking, and she could not have fallen into worse hands than those of the pitiless Italian overseer.

The marquise had scarce concluded her warning, ere Bartoletti entered the sitting-room with his daily report. His manner was extremely obsequious to Madame de Montmirail, and polite beyond expression to mademoiselle. The marquise scarcely noticed his demeanour at any time; her daughter observed him narrowly, with the air of a child who watches a toad or any such object for which it feels an unaccountable dislike. Cerise usually left the room soon after the signor entered it, but something in her mother's face on the present occasion, as she ran her eye over the black book, induced her to remain. The marquise read the punishment list twice; frowned, hesitated, and looked discomposed.

"It is her first offence?" said she inquiringly. "And the girl is generally active and well-behaved enough."

"Pardon, madame la marquise," answered Bartoletti. "Madame forgave her only last week when she lost half a dozen of mademoiselle's handkerchiefs, that she had taken to wash; or *said* she lost them," he added pointedly.

"Oh, mamma!" interposed Cerise, but the marquise checked her with a sign, and Bartoletti proceeded.

"One of her brothers is at the head of a gang of Maroons,[1] who infest the very mountains above our cane-pieces, and another ran away to join him last week. They say at the plantation we dare not punish any of the family, and I am pledged to make an example of the first that comes into my hands."

"Very well," said the marquise decidedly, returning his black book to her overseer, and observing to Cerise, who was by this time in tears, "A case, my dear, that it would be most injudicious to pardon. After all, the pain is not much, and the disgrace, you know, to that sort of people is nothing!"

[1] Runaway negroes who join in bands and live by plunder in the woods.

CHAPTER XXXI

BLACK, BUT COMELY

TRANSPLANTED, like some delicate flower from her native soil, to this glowing West Indian island, Mademoiselle de Montmirail had lost but little of the freshness that bloomed in the Norman convent, and had gained a more decided colouring and a deeper expression, which added the one womanly grace hitherto wanting in her beauty. Even the negroes, chattering to one another as they hoed between the cane-rows, grinned out their approval of her beauty, and Hippolyte, a gigantic and hideous Coromantee, imported from Africa, had been good enough to express his opinion that she only wanted a little more colour, as he called it, meaning a shade of yellow in her skin, to be handsome enough for his wife; whereat his audience shouted and showed their white teeth, wagging their woolly heads applaudingly, while the savage shook his great black shoulders, and looked as if he thought more unlikely events might come to pass.

Had it not been for these very slaves, who gave their opinions so freely on her personal appearance, Cerise would have been tolerably happy. She was, indeed, far from the scenes that were most endeared to her by memory and association. She was very uncertain when or how she should return to France, and until she returned, there was apparently no hope, however remote, that she could realise a certain dream which now constituted the charm of her whole life. Still the dream had been dreamed, vague, romantic, wild, and visionary; yet the girl dwelt upon it day by day, with a tenderness and a constancy the deeper and the more enduring that they seemed so hopeless and so thrown away.

I would not have it supposed, however, that Mademoiselle de Montmirail was a foolish love-sick maiden, who allowed her fancies to become the daily business of her life. On the contrary, she went through her duties scrupulously, making for herself occupation where she did not find it, helping her mother, working, reading, playing, improving her mind, and

doing all she could for the negroes on the estate, but tingeing everything unconsciously, whether of joy or sorrow, trouble or pleasure, with the rosy light of a love she had conceived without reason, cherished without reflection, and now brooded over without hope, in the depths of her own heart. But although the welfare of the slaves afforded her continual occupation, and probably prevented her becoming utterly wearied and overpowered by the sameness of her daily life, their wilfulness, their obstinacy, their petulant opposition to every experiment she was disposed to try for their moral and physical benefit, occasioned her many an hour of vexation and depression. Above all, the frequency of corporal punishment, a necessity of which she was dimly conscious, but would by no means permit herself to acknowledge, cut her to the heart. Silently and earnestly she would think over the problem, to leave it unsolved at last, because she could not but admit that the dictates of her feelings were opposed to the conclusions of her reason. Then she would wish she had absolute power on the plantation, would form vague schemes for the enlightenment of their own people and the enfranchisement of every negro as he landed, till, having once entered on the region of romance, she would pursue her journey to its usual termination, and see herself making the happiness of every one about her, none the less earnestly that the desire of her own heart was granted, her schemes, her labours, all her thoughts and feelings shared by the Grey Musketeer, whom yet it seemed so improbable she was ever to see again.

It wanted an hour of sunset. The evening breeze had set in with a refreshing breath that fluttered the skirt of her white muslin dress and the pink ribbons on her wide straw hat, as Mademoiselle de Montmirail strolled towards the negro-houses, carrying a *tisane* she had herself prepared for aunt Rosalie's sick child. The slaves were already down from the cane-pieces, laughing, jesting, singing, carrying their tools over their shoulders and their baskets or calabashes on their heads. A fat little negro of some eight years old, who reminded Cerise of certain bronze casts that held wax-lights in the Hôtel Montmirail, and who was indeed little less sparingly clad than those works of art, came running by, his saucy features shining with a merry excitement, in such haste that he could only pull himself up to make her a droll little reverence when he was almost under her feet. She recognised him as an elder brother of the very infant she was about to visit, and asked if baby was any better, but the child seemed

so intent on some proceeding of his own that she could not extort an answer.

"What is it, Hercule?" said she, laying her white hand on the little knotted woolly head. "Where are you off to in such a hurry? Is it a dance at the negro-houses, or a merry-making in the Square?"

The Square was a clear space, outside the huts of the field negroes, devoted to occasions of unusual display, and Hercule's thoughts were as obviously turned in that direction as his corpulent little person.

"Better bobbery nor dance," answered the imp, looking up earnestly in her face. "M'amselle Fleurette tied safe to howling-tree! Massa Hippolyte, him tall black nigger, floggee criss-cross. So! Make dis good little nigger laugh, why for, I go see!" and away scampered Hercule as fast as his short legs would carry him, followed by Cerise, who felt her cheek paling and her blood tingling to her fingers'-ends.

But aunt Rosalie's baby never got the *tisane*, for Mademoiselle de Montmirail spilt it all as she hurried on. Coming beyond the rows of negro-houses, she found a large assemblage of slaves, both men and women, ranged in a circle, many of the latter being seated on the ground, with their children crawling about their feet, while the fathers looked over the heads of their families, grinning in curiosity and delight. They were all eager to enjoy one of those spectacles to which the Square, as they chose to call it, was especially devoted.

In the centre of this open space, with the saffron light of a setting sun full upon her closed eyes and contracted features, cowered poor Fleurette, naked to the waist, secured hand and foot to a strong upright post which prevented her from falling, with her wrists tied together and drawn to a level somewhat higher than her head, so that she was unable even to contract her shoulders for protection from the lash. Though her shapely dark form and bosom were thus exposed, she seemed to feel less shame than fear; but the reason was now obvious why she had shrunk with such unusual terror from her odious and degrading punishment.

Looking on with callous indifference, and holding his black book in his hand, stood Bartoletti, austerely satisfied with this public recognition of his authority, but little interested in the result, save as it affected the length of time, more or less, during which the victim would be incapacitated from service. Behind the girl, and careful to remain at such a distance as allowed room for the sweep of his right arm,

'Halte là!' exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montmirail

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was stationed the most hideous figure in the scene: a tall powerful Coromantee negro, African-born, with all his savage propensities intensified by food, servitude, and the love of rum. He brandished a long-lashed, knotted whip in his broad hand, and eyeing the pliant shrinking figure before him, grinned like a demon in sheer desire of blood. He was to take his cue from the overseer. At the moment Cerise rounded the last of the negro-houses and came into full view of this revolting spectacle, Bartoletti's harsh Italian voice grated on the silence—"One!"

Hippolyte, such was the Coromantee's inappropriate name, drew himself back, raised his brawny arm, and the lash fell with a dull jerk, deadened by the flesh into which it cut. There was a faint moan, and the poor back quivered in helpless agony.

Cerise, in her white dress, burst through the sable circle like a flash.

"Two!" grated that harsh voice, and again the cruel lash came down, but it was dripping now with blood, and a long wailing shriek arose that would not be suppressed.

"*Halte là!*" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Montmirail, standing in the midst, pale, trembling, dilated, and with fire flashing from her blue eyes. "Take that girl down! this instant! I command it! Let me see who will dare to disobey!"

Even Hippolyte shrunk back, like some grotesque fiend rebuked. Bartoletti strove to expostulate, but somehow he was awed by the beauty of that holy wrath, so young, so fair, so terrible, and he dared not lift his eyes to meet those scorching looks. He cowered, he trembled, he signed to two negro women to obey mademoiselle, and then slunk doggedly away.

Cerise passed her arm caressingly round Fleurette's neck, she wiped the poor torn shoulders with her own laced handkerchief, she rested the dark woolly head on her bosom, and lifting the slave's face to her own, kissed her, once, twice, tenderly and pitifully on the lips.

Then Fleurette's tears gushed out: she sank to her young mistress's knees, she grovelled at her very feet, she kissed them, she hugged them, she pressed them to her eyes and mouth; she vowed, she sobbed, she protested, and, at least while her passion of gratitude and affection lasted, she spoke no more than the truth when she declared that she asked no better than to consecrate every drop of blood in her body, her life, her heart, her soul, to the service of Mademoiselle de Montmirail.

CHAPTER XXXII

A WISE CHILD

THE *Bashful Maid* was still lying peacefully at anchor in the harbour of Port Welcome, yards squared, sails furled, decks polished to a dazzling white, every article of gear and tackle denoting profound repose, even the very pennon from her truck drooping motionless in the heat. Captain George spent much of his time below, making up his accounts, with the invaluable assistance of Beaudésir, who, having landed soon after their arrival, remained an hour or two in the town, and returned to the brigantine, expressing no desire for further communication with the shore. George himself postponed his visit to the island until he had completed the task on which he was engaged.

In the meantime he gave plenty of liberty to the crew, an indulgence of which none availed themselves more freely than Slap-Jack and his two friends. These last indeed seldom stirred beyond the town. Here they found all they wanted in the shape of luxury or amusement: strong tobacco, new rum, an occasional scrape of a fiddle with a thrumming accompaniment on the banjo, nothing to do, plenty to drink, and a large room to smoke in. But the foretop-man was not so easily satisfied. Much to the disgust of his comrades, he seemed to weary of their society, to have lost his relish for fiery drinks and sea stories; nay, to have acquired diverse tastes and habits foreign to his nature and derogatory to his profession.

"Gone cruisin' thereaway," observed Bottle-Jack, vaguely waving his pipe in the direction of the mountains. "Never taken no soundings, nor kept no dead reckoning, nor signalled for a pilot, but just up foresail, drive-a-head, stem on, happy-go-lucky, an' who cares!" While Smoke-Jack, puffing out solemn clouds of fragrant Trinidado, enunciated sententiously that he "warn't a-goin' to dispute but what every craft should hoist her own ensign, an' lay her own course; but when he see a able seaman clearing out from such a berth as this here,

leaving the stiffest of grog and the strongest of bacca a-cause of a old yaller woman with a red burgee; why, he knowed the trim on 'em, that was where it was. See if it wasn't. Here's my service to you, mate—All ships at sea!"

Long ere the two staunch friends, however, had arrived at this intelligible conclusion, the object of their anxiety was half-way up the mountain, in fulfilment of the promise he had made Célandine to meet her at an appointed place.

In justice to Slap-Jack, it is but fair to admit that his sentiments in regard to the quadroon were those of keen curiosity mingled with pity for the obvious agitation under which she seemed to labour in his presence. Fair Alice herself, far off in her humble home among the downs, need not have grudged the elder woman an hour of her young seaman's society, although every minute of it seemed so strangely prized by this wild, energetic, and mysterious person, with her swarthy face, her scarlet head-dress, and her flashing eyes, gleaming with the fierce anxious tenderness of a leopardess separated from her whelps.

Slap-Jack's sea legs had hardly time to become fatigued, ere at a turn in the mountain-path he found Célandine waiting for him, and somewhat to his disgust, peering about in every direction, as if loth to be observed; a clandestine interpretation of their harmless meeting which roused the young seaman's ire, and against which he would have vehemently protested, had she not placed her hand over his mouth and implored him urgently, though in a whisper, to keep silence. Then she bade him follow, still below her breath, and so preceded him up the steep ascent with cautious, stealthy steps, but at a pace that made the foretop-man's unaccustomed knees shake and his breath come quick. The sun was hot, the mountain high, the path overgrown with cactus and other prickly plants, tangled with creepers and not devoid of snakes. Monkeys chattered, parrots screamed, glittering insects quivered like tinsel in the sun, or darted like flashes of coloured light across the forest-shade. Vistas of beauty, such as he had never dreamed of, opened out on either side, and looking back more than once to take breath while he ascended, the deep blue sea lay spread out beneath him, rising broader and broader to meet the blue transparent sky. But Slap-Jack, truth to tell, was sadly indifferent to it all. Uneasiness of the legs sadly counteracted pleasure of the eye. It was with considerable gratification that he observed his leader diverge from the upward path, and rounding the shoulder of the hill, take a direction somewhat on the downward slope. Then he

long time for a man to win his way into a girl's heart. Theirs is a cold country, and they have no African blood in their veins. All I know is, that your father had not spoken half a dozen words ere I felt for him as I never felt for any creature on earth before. I'd have jumped off the Sulphur Mountain, and never thought twice about it, if he had asked me. When we walked home together in the moonlight—for he begged hard to see me safe to my own door, and you may think I wasn't very difficult to persuade—I told him honestly that I had never loved any man but him, and never would love another, come what might. He looked down into my eyes for a moment astonished, just as you look now, and then he smiled—no face ever I saw had such a smile as your father's—and wound his great strong arm round my waist, and pressed me to his heart. I was happy then. If I might live over just one minute of my life again, it should be that first minute when I felt I belonged no more to myself, but to him.

"So we were married by an old Spanish priest in the little white chapel between the lighthouse and the town—yes, married right enough, my boy, never doubt it, though I was but a slave.

"I do not know how a great lady like our marquise feels who can give herself and all her possessions, proudly and in public, to the man she loves, but she ought to be very happy. I was very happy, though I might only meet your father by stealth, and with the fear of a punishment I shuddered to think of before my eyes. I thought of it very often too, yet not without pride and pleasure, to risk it all for his sake. What I dreaded far worse than punishment—worse than death, was the day his ship would sail, and though she lay weeks and months refitting in the harbour, that day arrived too soon. Never tell me people die of grief, my boy, since I came off the hill alive when I had seen the last of those white sails. I could have cursed the ship for taking him away, and yet I blessed her for his sake.

"There was consolation for me too. I had his solemn promise to come back again, and I'll never believe but he would have kept it had he been alive. Nothing shall persuade me that my brave, blue-eyed Englishman has not been sleeping many a year, rolled in his hammock, under the deep, dark sea. It was well the conviction came on me by degrees that I was never to see him again. I should have gone mad if I had known it that last night when he bade me keep my heart up, and trust him to the end. After a while I fretted less, for

my time was near, and my beautiful boy was born. Such an angel never lay on a mother's knees. My son, my son, you have the same eyes, and the same sweet smile still. I knew you that day in the street, long before I turned your collar down, and saw the little white mark like an anchor on your neck. How proud I was of you, and how I longed to show my sturdy, blue-eyed boy, who began to speak at eleven months, to every mother in the island, but I dared not—I dared not, for your sake more than for my own. I was cunning then—ay, cunning, and brave, and enduring as a panther. They never found me out—they never so much as suspected me. I had money, plenty of it, and influence too, with one man at least, who would have put his hand in the fire, coward as I think he is, if I had only made him a sign. With his help, I concealed the existence of my boy from every creature on the plantation—black or white. In his house I used to come and nurse you, dear, and play with you by the hour together. That man is my husband now, and I think he deserves a better fate.

"At last he was forced to leave the island, and then came another parting, worse than the first. It was only for myself I grieved when I lost your father, but when I was forced to trust my beautiful boy to the care of another, to cross the sea, to sleep in strange beds, to be washed and dressed by other hands, perhaps to meet with hard words and angry looks, or worse still, to clasp his pretty arms about a nurse's neck, and to forget the mother that bore him, I thought my heart would break. My boy, there is no such thing—I tell you again, these are fables—grief does not kill.

"For a long time I heard regularly of your welfare, and paid liberally for the good news. I was sure the man to whom I had entrusted you looked upon me as his future wife, and though I hated him for the thought, I—who loved that bold, strong, outspoken sailor—I permitted it, I encouraged it, for I believed it would make him kinder to my boy. When you were a little older, I meant to buy my own freedom, and take you with me to live in Europe—wherever you could be safe.

"At last a ship sailed into Port Welcome, and brought no letter for me, no news of my child. Another, and yet another, till months of longing, sickening anxiety had grown to years, and I was nearly mad with fear and pain. The father I had long despaired of, but I thought I was never to be used so hardly as to lose the child. I tell you again, my boy, grief does not kill. I lived on, but I was a different creature now.

My youth was gone, my beauty became terrible rather than attractive. I possessed certain powers that rendered me an object of dread more than love, and here, in this very hut, I devoted myself to the practice of Obi, and the study of that magic which has made the name of Célandine a word of fear to every negro in the island.

"One only aim, one only hope, kept me from going mad. Money I was resolved to possess, the more the better, for by the help of money alone, I thought, could I ever gain tidings of my boy. The slaves paid well in produce for the amulets and charms I sold them. That produce I converted into coin, but it came in too slow. In Europe I might calculate on better opportunities for gain, and to Europe I took the first opportunity of sailing, that I might join the mistress I had never seen, as attendant on her and her child. In their service I have remained to this day. The mother I have always respected for her indomitable courage; the daughter I loved from the first for her blue eyes, that reminded me of my boy.

"And now look at me once more, my child—my darling. I have found you when I had almost left off hoping; I have got you when I never expected to see you again; and I am rewarded at last!"

Slap-Jack, whose sentiments of filial affection came out the mellower for rum-and-water, accepted the quadroon's endearments with sufficient affability, and being naturally a good-hearted, easy-going fellow, gladly enacted the part of dutiful son to a mother who had suffered such long anxiety on his account.

"A-course," said he, returning her embrace, "now you've got a son, you ain't a-goin' to keep him in this here round-house, laid up in lavender like, as precious as a Blue Mountain monkey pickled in rum. We'll just wait here a bit, you and me, safe and snug, while the land breeze holds, and then drop easily down into the town, rouse out my shipmates, able seamen every man of them, and go in for a regular spree. 'Tain't every day as a chap finds his mother, you know, and such a start as this here didn't ought to be passed over without a bobbery."

She listened to him delighted. His queer phrases were sweet in her ears; to her they were no vulgar sea-slang, but the echo of a love-music that had charmed her heart, and drowned her senses half a lifetime ago; that rang with something of the old thrilling vibration still; but the wild look of terror that had scared him more than once gleamed again in

her eyes, and she laid her hand on his shoulder as if to keep him down by force, while she whispered—"My child, not so! How rash, how reckless! Just like your father; but he, at least, had not your fate to fear. Do you not see your danger? Can you not guess why I concealed your birth, hid you up in your babyhood, and smuggled you out of the island as soon as you could run? Born of a slave, on a slave estate, do you not know, my boy, that you, too, are a slave?"

"Gammon! mother," exclaimed Slap-Jack, nothing daunted. "What, *me?*—captain of the fore-top on board the *Bashful Maid*—six guns on the main-deck, besides carronades—master and owner, Captain George! and talk to me as if I was one of them darkies what does mule's work with monkey's allowance! Who's to come and take me, I should like to know? Let 'em heave ahead an' do it, that's all—a score at a spell if they can muster 'em. I'll show 'em pretty quick what sort of a slave they can make out of an able seaman!"

"Hush, hush!" she exclaimed, listening earnestly, and with an expression of intense fear contracting her worn features; "I can hear them coming—negroes by the footfall, and a dozen at least. They will be at the door in five minutes. They have turned by the old hog-plum now. As you love your life, my boy; nay, as you love your mother, who has pined and longed for you all these years, let me hide you away in there. You will be safe. Trust me, you will be safe enough; they will never think of looking for you there!"

So speaking, and notwithstanding much good-humoured expostulation and resistance from Slap-Jack, who, treating the whole affair as a jest, was yet inclined to fight it out all the same, Célandine succeeded in pushing her son into an inner division of the hut, containing only a bed-place, shut off by a strong wooden door. This she closed hurriedly at the very moment a dozen pattering footsteps halted outside, and a rough negro voice, in accents more imperative than respectful, demanded instant admission.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JACK AGROUND

OPENING the door with a yawn, and stretching her arms like one lately roused from sleep, the quadroon found herself face to face with the Coromantee, backed by nearly a score of negroes, the idlest and most dissolute slaves on the estate. All seemed more or less intoxicated, and Célandine, who knew the African character thoroughly, by no means liked their looks. She was aware that much disaffection existed in the plantation, and the absence of this disorderly gang from their work at so early an hour in the afternoon argued something like open revolt. It would have been madness, however, to show fear, and the Obi-woman possessed, moreover, a larger share of physical courage than is usual with her sex: assuming, therefore, an air of extreme dignity, she stationed herself in the doorway and demanded sternly what they wanted.

Hippolyte, who seemed to be leader of the party, doffed his cabbage-tree hat with ironical politeness, and pointing over his shoulder at two grinning negroes laden with plantains and other garden produce, came to business at once.

"We buy—you sell, Missee Célandine. Same as storekeeper down Port Welcome. Fust ask gentlemen step in, sit down, take something to drink."

There was that in his manner which made her afraid to refuse, and inviting the whole party to enter, she accommodated them with difficulty in the hut. Reviewing her assembled guests, the quadroon's heart sank within her; but she was conscious of possessing cunning and courage, so summoned both to her aid.

A negro, under excitement, from whatever cause, is a

formidable-looking companion. Those animal points of head and countenance, by which he is distinguished from the white man, then assume an unseemly prominence. The lips thicken, the temples swell, the eyes roll, the brow seems to recede, and the whole face alters for the worse, like that of a vicious horse, when he lays his ears back, prepared to kick. Célandine's visitors displayed all these alarming signs, and several other disagreeable peculiarities, the result of partial intoxication. Some of them carried axes, she observed, and all had knives. Their attire too, though of the gaudiest colours, was extremely scanty, ragged, and unwashed. They jested with one another freely enough, as they sat huddled together on the floor of the hut, but showed little of the childish good-humour common among prosperous and well-ordered slaves; while she augured the worst from the absence of that politeness which, to do him justice, is a prominent characteristic of the negro. Nevertheless, she dissembled her misgivings, affected an air of dignified welcome, handed round the calabash, with its accompanying stone bottle, to all in turn, and felt but little reassured to find that the rum was nearly exhausted when it had completed the circle.

"Thirteen gentlemen, Missee Célandine," observed the Coromantee, tossing off his measure of raw spirits with exceeding relish; "thirteen charms, best Obi-woman can furnish for the price, 'gainst evil eye, snake-bite, Jumbo-stroke, fire, water, and cold steel, all 'counted for, honourable, in dem plantain baskets. Hi! you lazy nigger, pay out. Say, again, missee, what day this of the month?"

Célandine affected to consider.

"The thirteenth," she answered gravely; "the most unlucky day in the whole year."

Hippolyte's black face fell.

"Golly!" said he. "Unlucky! for why? for what? Dis nigger laugh at luck," he added, brightening up and turning what liquor was left in the stone bottle down his own throat. "Lookee here, missee; you Obi-woman, right enough; you nigger too, yaller all same as black: you go pray Jumbo for luck. All paid for in dat basket. Pray Jumbo no rain to-night, put um fire out. Our work, make bobbery; your work, stay up mountain where spirit can hear, and pray Jumbo till monkeys wake."

A suspicion that had already dawned on the quadroon's mind was now growing horribly distinct. It was obvious some important movement must be intended by the gang

that filled her hut, and there was every fear a general rising might take place of all the slaves on the plantation, if indeed the insurrection spread no farther than the Montmirail estate. She knew, none better, the nature of the half-reclaimed savage. She thought of her courageous, high-souled mistress, of her delicate, beautiful nursling, and shivered while she pictured them in the power of this huge black monster who sat grinning at her over the empty calabash. She even forgot for the moment her own long-lost son, hidden up within six feet of her, and the double danger he would run in the event of detection. She could only turn her mind in one direction, and that was, where madame and mademoiselle were sitting, placid and unconscious, in the rich white dresses her own fingers had helped to make. Their possible fate was too horrible to contemplate. She forced it from her thoughts, and with all her power of self-concentration, addressed herself to the means of saving them at any cost. In such an emergency as the present, surrounded, and perhaps suspected, by the mutineers, dissimulation seemed her only weapon left, and to dissimulation she betook herself without delay.

"Hippolyte," said she, "you are a good soldier. You command all these black fellows; I can see it in your walk. I always said you had the air of an officer of France."

The Coromantee seemed not insensible to flattery. He grinned, wagged his head, rolled his eyes, and was obviously well pleased.

"Dese niggers make me deir colonel," said he, springing from the floor to an attitude of military attention. "Hab words of command like buckra musketeer. *Par file à droite—Marche! Volte-face!* Run for your lives!"

"I knew it," she replied, "and you ought to have learned already to trust your comrades. Are we not in the same ranks? You say yourself, yellow and black are all one. You and I are near akin; your people are the people of my mother's mother; whom you trust, I trust; whom you hate, I hate, but far more bitterly, because my injuries are older and deeper than yours."

He opened his eyes wondering, but the rum had taken effect, and nothing, not even the quadroon's disloyalty to her mistress, seemed improbable now. An Obi-woman too, if really in earnest, he considered a valuable auxiliary; so signed his approval by another grin and a grunt of acquiescence.

"I live but for one object now," continued Célandine, in a tone of repressed fury that did credit to her power of acting.

"I have been waiting all my life for my revenge, and it seems to have come at last. The marquise should have given me my freedom long ago if she wished me to forgive. Ay, they may call me *Mustee*, but I am black, black as yourself, my brave Hippolyte, at heart. She struck me once,—I tell you, struck me with her riding-whip, far away yonder in France, and I will have her blood."

It is needless to observe this imputed violence was a fabrication for the especial benefit of Hippolyte, and the energy with which he pronounced the ejaculation "Golly!" denoted that he placed implicit reliance on its truth.

"You are brave," continued Célandine; "you are strong; you are the fine tall negro whom we call the Pride of the Plantation. You do not know what it is to hate like a poor weak woman. I would have no scruple, no mercy; I would spare none, neither madame nor mademoiselle."

"Ma'amselle come into woods with me," interrupted Hippolyte, with a horrible leer. "Good enough wife for Pride of Plantation. Lilly-face look best by um side of black man. Ma'amselle guess me come for marry her. When floggee Fleurette, look at me so, afore all de niggers, sweet as molasses!"

Again Célandine shivered. The wretch's vanity would have been ludicrous, had he not been so formidable from his recklessness, and the authority he seemed to hold over his comrades. She prepared to learn the worst.

"They will both be in our power to-night, I suppose," said she, repressing with a strong effort her disgust and fierce desire to snatch his long knife and stab him where he stood. "Tell me your plan of attack, my brave colonel, and trust me to help you to the utmost."

The Coromantee looked about him suspiciously, rolling his eyes in obvious perplexity. The superstition inherent in his nature made him desirous of obtaining her assistance, while the quadroon's antecedents, and particularly her marriage with the overseer, seemed to infer that she would prove less zealous than she affected to be in the cause of insurrection. He made up his mind therefore to bind her by an oath, which he himself dictated, and made her swear by the mysterious power she served, and from which she derived her influence, to be true, silent, and merciless, till the great event had been accomplished, all the whites in authority massacred, and the whole estate in the power of the slaves. Every penalty, both horrible and ludicrous, that the grotesque imagination of a savage could devise, was called down upon her head in the

event of treachery; and Célandine, who was a sufficiently good Catholic at heart, swallowed all these imprecations imperturbably enough, pledging herself, without the slightest hesitation, to the conspiracy.

Then Hippolyte was satisfied and unfolded his plans, while the others gathered round with fearful interest, wagging their heads, rolling their eyes, grinning, stamping, and ejaculating deep gutturals of applause.

His scheme was feasible enough; nor to one who knew no scruples of gratitude, no instincts of compassion, did it present any important obstacles. He was at the head of an organised body, comprising nearly all the male slaves on the plantation; a body prepared to rise at a moment's notice, if only assured of success. The dozen negroes who accompanied him had constituted themselves his guards, and were pledged to strike the first blow, at his command. They were strong, able-bodied, sensual, idle, dissolute, unscrupulous, and well enough fitted for their enterprise, but that they were arrant cowards, one and all. As, however, little resistance could be anticipated, this poltroonery was the more to be dreaded by their victims, that in the hour of triumph it would surely turn to cruelty and excess.

Hippolyte, who was not deficient in energy, had also been in communication with the disaffected slaves on the adjoining estates; these too were sworn to rise at a given signal, and the Coromantee, feeling that his own enterprise could scarcely fail, entertained a fervent hope that in a few hours the whole of the little island, from sea to sea, would be in possession of the negroes, and he himself chosen as their chief. The sack and burning of Port Welcome, the massacre of the planters and abduction of their families, were exciting little incidents of the future, on which he could hardly trust himself to dwell; but the first step in the great enterprise was to be taken at Montmirail West, and to its details Célandine now listened with a horror that, while it curdled her blood, she was forced to veil under a pretence of zeal and enthusiasm in the cause.

Her only hope was in the brigantine. Her early associations had taught her to place implicit reliance on a boat's crew of English sailors, and if she could but delay the attack until she had communicated with the privateer, mademoiselle —for it was of mademoiselle she chiefly thought—might be rescued even yet. If she could but speak to her son, lying within three feet of her! If she could but make him understand the emergency! How she trusted he overheard their

conversation! How she prayed he might not have been asleep the whole time!

Hippolyte's plan of attack was simple enough. It would be dark in a couple of hours. Long before then, he and his little band meant to advance as far as the skirts of the bush, from whence they could reconnoitre the house. Doors and windows would all be open. There was but one white man in the place, and he unarmed. Nothing could be easier than to overpower the overseer, and perhaps, for Célandine's sake, his life might be spared. Then, it was the Coromantee's intention to secure the marquise and her daughter, which he opined might be done with little risk, and at the expense of a shriek or two; to collect in the store-room any of the domestic slaves, male or female, who showed signs of resistance, and there lock them up; to break open the cellar, serve out a plentiful allowance of wine to his guards, and then, setting fire to the house, carry the marquise and her daughter into the mountains. The former, to be kept as a hostage, slain, or otherwise disposed of, according to circumstances; the latter, as the African expressed it with hideous glee, "for make lilly-face chief wife to dis here handsome nigger!"

Célandine affected to accept his views with great enthusiasm, but objected to the time appointed.

"The moon," said she gravely, "is yet in her first quarter. Her spirit is gone a journey to the mountains of Africa to bless the bones of our forefathers. It will be back to-morrow. Jumbo has not been sufficiently propitiated. Let us sacrifice to him for one night more with jar and calabash. I will send down for rum to the stores. Brave colonel, you and your guards shall bivouac here outside her hut, while the Obi-woman remains within to spend the night in singing and making charms. Jumbo will thus be pleased, and to-morrow the whole island may be ours without opposition."

But Hippolyte was not to be deceived so easily. His plans admitted of no delay, and the flames ascending from the roof of Montmirail West, that same night, were to be the signal for a general rising from sea to sea. His short period of influence had already taught him that such a blow as he meditated, to be effectual, must be struck at once. Moreover, the quality of cunning in the savage seems strong in proportion to his degradation; the Coromantee was a very fox for vigilance and suspicion, nor did he fail to attribute Célandine's desire for procrastination to its true motive.

"To-night, Obi-woman!" said he resolutely. "To-night, or no night at all. Dis nigger no leave yaller woman here, fear of accidents. Perhaps to-morrow free blacks kill you same as white. You come with us down mountain-side into clearing. We keep you safe. You make prayer and sing whole time."

With a mischievous leer at a couple of his stalwart followers, he pointed to the quadroon. They sprang from the ground and secured her, one on each side. The unfortunate Obi-woman strove hard to disarm suspicion by an affectation of ready compliance, but it was obvious they mistrusted her fidelity and had no intention of letting her out of their sight. It was with difficulty that she obtained a few moments' respite, on the plea that night was about to fall, for the purpose of winding her shawl more carefully round her head, and in that brief space she endeavoured to warn her son of the coming outbreak, with a maddening doubt the while that he might not understand their purport, even if he could hear her words. Turning towards the door, behind which he was concealed, under pretence of arranging her head-gear at a bit of broken looking-glass against the panel, she sang, with as marked an emphasis as she dared, a scrap of some doggerel sea-ditty, which she had picked up from her first love in the old happy days, long ago—

"The boatswain looked upon the land,
And shrill his whistle blew,
The oars were out, the boat was manned,
Says he, 'My gallant crew,

Our captain in a dungeon lies,
The sharks have got him flat,
But if we fire the town, my boys,
We'll have him out of that!

We'll stop their jaw, we'll spike their gun!
We'll larn 'em what they're at—
You bend your backs, and pull, my sons,
We'll have him out of that!'"

This she sang twice, and then professed her readiness to accompany Hippolyte and his band down the mountain, delaying their departure, however, by all the means she could think of, including profuse offers of hospitality, which had but little effect, possibly because the guests were personally satisfied that there was nothing left to drink.

Nay, even on the very threshold of the hut she turned

back once more, affecting to have forgotten the most important of the amulets she carried about her person, and, crossing the floor with a step that must have awakened the soundest sleeper, repeated, in clear loud tones, the boatswain's injunction to his men—

"You bend your backs, and pull, my sons,
We'll have him out of that!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

JACK AFLOAT

BUT Slap-Jack was not asleep, far from it. His narrow hiding-place offered but little temptation to repose, and almost the first sentence uttered by Hippolyte aroused the suspicions of a man accustomed to anticipate, without fearing, danger, or, as he expressed it, "to look out for squalls."

He listened therefore intently the whole time, and although the Coromantee's jargon was often unintelligible, managed to gather quite enough of its meaning to assure him that some gross outrage was in preparation, of which a white lady and her daughter were to be the victims. Now it is not only on the boards of a seaport theatre that the British sailor vindicates his character for generous courage on behalf of the conventional female in distress. The stage is, after all, a representation, however extravagant, of real life, and the caricature must not be exaggerated out of all likeness to its original. Coarse in his language, rough in his bearing, reckless and riotous from the very nature of his calling, there is yet in the thorough-going English seaman a leavening of tenderness, simplicity, and self-sacrifice, which, combined with his dauntless bravery, affords no ignoble type of manhood. He is a child in his fancies, his credulity, his affections; a lion in his defiance of peril and his sovereign contempt for pain. With regard to women, whatever may be his practice, his creed is pure, exalted, and utterly opposed to his own experience; while his instincts prompt him on all occasions, and against any odds, to take part with the weaker side. Compared with the landsman, he is always a little behind the times in worldly knowledge, possessing the faults and virtues of an earlier age. With both of these in some excess, his chivalry is unimpeachable, and a sense of honour that would not disgrace the noblest chapters of knighthood is to be found nerving the blue-streaked arms and swelling the brawny chests that man the forecastle.

Slap-Jack knew enough of his late-discovered mother's

position to be familiar with the name of the marquise and the situation of Montmirail West. As he was the only seaman belonging to the *Bashful Maid* who had been tempted beyond the precincts of the port, this knowledge was shared by none of his shipmates. Captain George himself, postponing his shore-going from hour to hour, while he had work in hand, little dreamed he was within two leagues of Cerise. Beaudésir had never repeated his visit to the town; and every other man in the brigantine was too much occupied by duty or pleasure—meaning anchor-watch on board, alternated by rum and fiddlers ashore—to think of extending his cruise a yard farther inland than the nearest drinking-house.

On Slap-Jack, therefore, devolved the task of rescuing the marquise and her daughter from the grasp of "that big black swab," as the foretop-man mentally denominated him, whom he longed ardently to pitch into on the spot. He understood the position. His mother's sea-song was addressed to no inattentive nor unwilling ears. He saw the difficulties and, indeed, the dangers of his undertaking; but the latter he despised, while the former he resolved to overcome; and he never lay out upon a yard to reef topsails in the fiercest squall with a clearer brain or a stouter heart than he now summoned to his aid on behalf of the ladies whom his mother loved so well. Creeping from his hiding-place, he listened anxiously to the retreating footfall of the blacks, and even waited several minutes after it had died away to assure himself the coast was clear. Discovery would have been fatal; for armed though he was with a cutlass and pistols, thirteen to one, as he sagely reflected, was long odds; and "if I should be scuttled," thought he, "before I can make signals, why, what's to become of the whole convoy?" Therefore he was very cautious and reflective. He pondered, he calculated, he reckoned his time, he enumerated his obstacles, he laid out his plans before he proceeded to action. His only chance was to reach the brigantine without delay, and report the whole matter to the skipper forthwith, who he was convinced would at once furnish a boat's crew to defend the ladies, and probably put himself at their head.

Emerging from the hut, he observed to his consternation that it was already dusk. There is but a short twilight in these low latitudes, where the evening hour—sweetest of the whole twenty-four—is gone almost as soon as it arrives—

> "The sun's rim dips,
> The stars rush out,
> At one stride comes the dark."

And that dark, in the jungle of a West Indian island, is black as midnight. It was well for Slap-Jack that a seaman's instinct had prompted him to take his bearings before he came up the mountain. These, from time to time, he corrected during his ascent, at the many places where he paused for breath. He knew, therefore, the exact direction of the town and harbour. Steering by the stars, he was under no apprehension of losing his way, and could make for the brigantine where she lay. Tightening his belt, then, he commenced the descent at a run, resolving to keep the path as long as he could see it, and when it was lost in the bush at last, to plunge boldly through till he reached the shore.

The misadventure he foresaw soon came to pass. A path which he could hardly have followed by daylight, without Célandine to pilot him, soon disappeared from beneath his feet in the deepening gloom. He had not left the hut many minutes ere he was struggling, breast-high, amongst the wild vines and other creepers that twined and festooned in a tangle of vegetable network from tree to tree. The scene was novel and picturesque, yet I am afraid he cursed and swore a good deal, less impressed with its beauty than alive to its inconveniences. Overhead, indeed, he caught a glimpse of the stars, by which he guided his course through the interlacing boughs of the tall forest trees, and underfoot, the steady lamp of the glow-worm, and the sparks of a thousand wheeling fire-flies shed a light about his path; but these advantages only served to point out the dangers and difficulties of his progress. With their dubious help, every creeper thicker than ordinary assumed the appearance of some glistening snake, swinging from the branch in a grim repose that it was death to disturb; every rotten stump leaning forward in its decay, draped with its garment of trailing parasites, took the form of a watchful savage, poising his gigantic form in act to strike; while a wild boar, disturbed from his lair between the roots of an enormous gum-tree, to shamble off at a jog-trot, grumbling, in search of thicker covert, with burning eye, gnashing tusks, and most discordant grunt, swelled to the size of a rhinoceros. Slap-Jack's instincts prompted him to salute the monster with a shot from one of the pistols that hung at his belt, but reflecting on the necessity of caution, he refrained with difficulty, consoling himself by the anticipation of several days' leave ashore, and a regular shooting party with his mates, in consideration of his services to-night.

Thus he struggled on, breathless, exhausted, indefatig-

able—now losing himself altogether, till a more open space in the branches, through which he could see the stars, assured him that he was in a right direction—now obtaining a glimpse of some cane-piece, or other clearing, white in the tender light of the young moon, which had already risen, and thus satisfying himself that he was gradually emerging from the bush, and consequently nearing the shore—now tripping over a fallen tree—now held fast in a knot of creepers—now pierced to the bone by a prickly cactus, torn, bleeding, tired, sore, and drenched with perspiration, but never losing heart for a moment, nor deviating, notwithstanding his enforced windings, one cable's length from the direct way.

Thus at last he emerged on a clearing already trenched and hoed for the reception of sugar-canes, and, to his infinite joy, beheld his own shadow, black and distinct, in the trembling moonlight. The bush was now behind him, the slope of the hill in his favour, and he could run down, uninterrupted, towards the pale sea lying spread out like a sheet of silver at his feet. He crossed a road here that he knew must lead him into the town, but it would have taken him somewhat out of his course for the brigantine, and he had resolved to lose no time, even for the chance of obtaining a boat.

He made, therefore, direct for the shore, and in a few minutes he was standing on a strip of sand, with the retiring tide plashing gratefully on his ear, while his eyes were fixed on the tapering spars of the *Bashful Maid*, and the light glimmering in her foretop.

He stepped back a few paces to lay his arms and some of his garments behind a rock, a little above high-water mark. There was small chance he would ever find them again, but he belonged to a profession of which the science is essentially precautionary, and the habit of foresight was a second nature to Slap-Jack. In a few more seconds he was up to his knees, his middle, his breast-bone, in the cooling waters, till a receding wave lifted him off his feet, and he struck out boldly for the brigantine.

How delightful to his heated skin was the contact of the pure, fresh, buoyant element! Notwithstanding his fatigue, his hurry, his anxiety, he could have shouted aloud in joy and triumph, as he felt himself wafted on those long, regular, and powerful strokes nearer and nearer to his object. It was the exultation of human strength and skill and daring, dominant over nature, unassisted by mechanical art.

Yet was there one frightful drawback, a contingency which had been present to his mind from the very begin-

ning, even while he was beating laboriously through the jungle, but which he had never permitted himself to realise, and on which it would now be maddening to dwell: Port Welcome was infested with sharks! He forced himself to ignore the danger, and swam gallantly on, till the wash and ripple of the tide upon the shore was far behind him, and he heard only his own deep measured breathing, and the monotonous plash of those springing, regulated strokes that drove him steadily out to sea. He was already tired, and had turned on his back more than once for relief, ere the hull of the brigantine rose black and steep out of the water half a cable's length ahead. He counted that after fifty more strokes he would summon breath to hail the watch on deck. He had scarce completed them ere a chill went curdling through his veins from head to heel, and if ever Slap-Jack lost heart it was then. The water surged beneath him, and lifted his whole body, like a wave, though the surrounding surface was smooth as a mill-pond. One desperate kick, that shot him two fathoms at a stroke, and his passing foot grazed some slimy, scaly substance, while from the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse the moment after of the back-fin of a shark. Then he hailed in good earnest, swimming his wickedest the while, and ere the voracious sea-scourge, or its consort, could turn over for a leisurely snap at him, Slap-Jack was safe in the bight of a rope, and the anchor-watch, not a little astonished, were hauling their exhausted shipmate over the side.

"Come on board, sir!" exclaimed the new arrival, scrambling breathless to his feet, after tumbling head-foremost over the gunwale, and pulling with ludicrous courtesy at his wet hair. "Come on board, sir. Hands wanted immediate. Ax your honour's pardon. So blown I can hardly speak. First-class row among the niggers. Bobbery all over the island. Devil to pay, and no pitch hot!"

Captain George was on deck, which perhaps accounted for the rapidity of the foretop-man's rescue, and although justly affronted by so unceremonious a return on the part of a liberty-man who had out-stayed his leave, he saw at a glance that some great emergency was imminent, and prepared to meet it with habitual coolness.

"Silence, you fool!" said he, pointing to a negro amongst the crew. "Lend him a jacket, some of you. Come below at once to my cabin, and make your report. You can be punished afterwards."

Slap-Jack followed his commander nothing loth. The

after-punishment, as being postponed for twenty-four hours at least, was a matter of no moment, but a visit to the captain's cabin entailed, according to the etiquette of the service, a measure of grog, mixed on certain liberal principles, that from time immemorial have regulated the strength of that complimentary refreshment. In all such interviews it is customary for the skipper to produce his spirit-case, a tumbler, and a jug of water. The visitor helps himself, and esteems it only good breeding that he should charge his glass to the depth of three fingers with alcohol, filling it up with the weaker fluid. When the thickness of a seaman's fingers is considered, and the breadth to which he can spread them out on such occasions, it is easy to conceive how little space is left near the rim of the vessel for that insipid element, every additional drop of which is considered by competent judges to spoil the beverage. Slap-Jack mixed as liberally as another. Ere his draught, however, was half finished, or his report nearly concluded, the captain had turned the hands up, and ordered a boat to be manned forthwith, leaving Beaudésir to command in his absence; but true to his usual system, informing no one, not even Beaudésir, of his intentions or his destination.

CHAPTER XXXV

BESIEGED

IN the meantime poor Célandine found herself hurried down the mountain by Hippolyte and his band, in a state of anxiety and alarm that would have paralysed the energies of most women, but that roused all the savage qualities dormant in the character of the quadroon. Not a word of her captors, not a look escaped her; and she soon discovered, greatly to her dismay, that she was regarded less as an auxiliary than a hostage. She was placed in the centre of the band, unbound indeed, and apparently at liberty; but no sooner did she betray, by the slightest independence of movement, that she considered herself a free agent, than four stalwart blacks closed in on her with brutal glee, attempting no concealment of a determination to retain her in their power till they had completed their merciless design.

"Once gone," said Hippolyte, politely affecting great reverence for the Obi-woman's supernatural powers, "never catchee no more!—Jumbo fly away with yaller woman, same as black. Dis nigger no 'fraid of Jumbo, so long as Missee Célandine at um back. Soon dark now. March on, you black villains, and keep your ranks, same as buckra musketeer!"

With such exhortations to discipline, and an occasional compliment to his own military talents, Hippolyte beguiled their journey down the mountain. It seemed to Célandine that far too short a space of time had elapsed ere they reached the skirts of the forest, and even in the deepening twilight could perceive clearly enough the long low building of Cash-a-crou, now called Montmirail West. The lamps were already lit in the sitting-room on the ground floor. From where she stood, in the midst of the band, outwardly stern and collected, quivering with rage and fear within, the quadroon could distinguish the figures of madame la marquise and her daughter, moving here and there in the apartment, or leaning out at window for a breath of the cool, refreshing evening air.

Their commander kept his men under covert of the woods,

waiting till it should be quite dark. There was little to fear from a garrison consisting of but two ladies, backed by Fleurette and Bartoletti, for the other domestic slaves were either involved in the conspiracy or had been inveigled out of the way by its chief promoters; yet notwithstanding the weakness of the besieged, some dread of their ascendency made the negroes loth to encounter by daylight even such weak champions of the white race as two helpless women and a cowardly Italian overseer. Nevertheless, every moment gained was worth a purse of gold. Célandine, affecting to identify herself with the conspirators, urged on them the prudence of delay. Hippolyte, somewhat deceived by her enthusiasm, offered an additional reason for postponing the attack, in the brilliancy of a conflagration under a night sky. He intended, he said, to begin by setting fire to the house—there could then be no resistance from within. There would be plenty of time, he opined, for drink and plunder before the flames gained a complete ascendency, and he seemed to cherish some vague half-formed notion that it would be a fine thing to appear before Cerise in the character of a hero, who should rescue her from a frightful death.

A happy thought struck the quadroon.

"It was lucky you brought me with you," said she earnestly. "Brave as you are, I fancy you would have been scared had you acted on your own plan. You talk of firing Cash-a-crou, as you would of roasting a turtle in its shell. Do you know that madame keeps a dozen barrels of gunpowder stowed away about the house—nobody knows where but herself? You would have looked a little foolish, I think, my brave colonel, to find your long body blown clean over the Sulphur Mountain into the sea on the other side of the island. You and your guard here are as handsome a set of blacks as a yellow woman need wish to look on. Not a morsel would have been left of any one of you the size of my hand!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Hippolyte in consternation. "Missee Célandine, you go free for tanks, when this job clean done. Hi! you black fellows, keep under shadow of gum-tree dere—change um plan now," he added thoughtfully; and without taking his keen eyes off Célandine, walked from one to the other of his band, whispering fresh instructions to each.

The quadroon counted the time by the beating of her heart. "Now," she thought, "my boy must have gained the edge of the forest—ten minutes more to cross the new cane-pieces—another ten to reach the shore. He can swim of

course—his father swam like a pilot-fish. In forty minutes he might be on board. Five to man a boat—and ten more to pull her in against the ebb. Then they have fully a league to march, and sailors are such bad walkers." At this stage of her reflections something went through her heart like a knife. She thought of the grim ground-sharks, heaving and gaping in the warm translucent depths of the harbour at Port Welcome.

But meanwhile Hippolyte had gathered confidence from the bearing of his comrades. Their numbers and fierceness inspired him with courage, and he resolved to enter the house at the head of his chosen bodyguard, whilst he surrounded it with a score of additional mutineers who had joined him according to previous agreement at the head of the forest. These, too, had brought with them a fresh supply of rum, and Célandine observed with horror its stimulating effects on the evil propensities of the band.

While he made his further dispositions, she found herself left for a few seconds comparatively unwatched, and at once stole into the open moonlight, where her white dress could be discerned plainly from the house. She knew her husband would be smoking his evening tobacco, according to custom, in the verandah. At little more than a hundred paces he could hardly fail to see her; and in an instant she had unbound the red turban and waved it round her head, in the desperate hope that he might accept that warning for a danger signal. The quick-witted Italian seemed to comprehend at once that something was wrong. He imitated her gesture, retired into the house, and the next minute his figure was seen in the sitting-room with the marquise and her daughter. By this time Hippolyte had returned to her side, and she could only watch in agony for the result. Completely surrounded by the intoxicated and infuriated negroes, there seemed to be no escape for the besieged, while the looks and gestures of their leader, closely copied by his chosen band, denoted how little of courtesy or common humanity was to be expected from the Coromantee, excited to madness by all the worst passions of his savage nature bursting from the enforced restraints that had so long kept them down.

A bolder spirit than the signor's might have been excused for betraying considerable apprehension in such a crisis, and in good truth Bartoletti was fairly frightened out of his wits. In common with the rest of the whites on the island, he had long suspected a conspiracy amongst the negroes, and feared that such an insurrection would take place; but no great

social misfortune is ever really believed in till it comes, and he had neither taken measures for its prevention, nor thoroughly realised the magnitude of the evil. Now that he felt it was upon him he knew not where to turn for aid. There was no time to make phrases or to stand on ceremony. He rushed into the sitting-room with a blanched cheek and a wild eye, that caused each of the ladies to drop her work on her lap, and gaze at him in consternation.

"Madame!" he exclaimed, and his jaw shook so that he could hardly form the syllables, "we must leave the house at once—we must save ourselves. There is an *émeute*, a revolt, a rebellion among the slaves. I know them—the monsters! They will not be appeased till they have drunk our blood. Oh! why did I ever come to this accursed country?"

Cerise turned as white as a sheet—her blue eyes were fixed, her lips apart. Even the marquise grew pale, though her colour came back, and she held her head the more erect a moment afterwards.

"Sit down," she said imperiously, yet kindly enough. "Take breath, my good man, and take courage also. Tell me exactly what you have seen;" and added, turning to Cerise, "Don't be frightened, my child—these overseers are sad alarmists. I daresay it is only what the negroes call a 'bobbery' after all!"

Then Bartoletti explained that he had seen his wife waving a red shawl from the edge of the jungle; that this was a preconcerted signal by which they had agreed to warn each other of imminent danger; that it was never to be used except on great emergencies; and that he was quite sure it was intended to convey to him that she was in the power of the slaves, and that the rising they had so often talked about had taken place at last.

The marquise thought for a moment. She seemed to have no fear now that she realised her danger. Only once, when her eye rested on her daughter, she shuddered visibly. Otherwise, her bearing was less that of a tender woman in peril of her life, than of some wise commander, foiled and beset by the enemy, yet not altogether without hope of securing his retreat. So might have looked one of her warlike ancestors when the besiegers set fire to his castle by the Garonne, and he resolved to betake himself, with his stout veterans, to the square stone keep where the well was dug—a maiden fortress, that had never yet succumbed to famine nor been forced by escalade.

"Is there anyone in the house whom we can trust?"

said the marquise; and even while she spoke a comely black girl came crawling to her feet, and seized her hand to cover it with tears and kisses.

"Iss, missis!" exclaimed Fleurette, for Fleurette it was, who had indeed been listening at the door for the last five minutes. "You trust *me*! Life for life! Blood for blood! No fear Jumbo, so lilly ma'amselle go out safe. Trust Fleurette, missis. Trust Fleurette, ma'amselle. Fleurette die at um house-door, so! better than ugly black floggee-man come in."

The marquise listened calmly.

"Attend to me, Fleurette," said she, with an authoritative gesture. "Go at once through the kitchen into the dark path that leads to the old summer-house. See if the road to Port Welcome is clear. There is no bush on that side within five hundred paces, and if they mean to stop us, they must post a guard between the house and the gum-trees. Do not show yourself, girl, but if they take you, say Célandine sent you down to the negro-houses for eggs. Quick, and come back here like lightning. Bartoletti—have you any fire-arms? Do not be afraid, my darling," she repeated, turning to her daughter, "I know these wretched people well. You need but show a bold front, and they would turn away from a lady's fan if you only shook it hard at them."

"I am not afraid, mamma," answered Cerise valiantly, though her face was very pale, and her knees shook. "I—I don't *like* it, of course, but I can do anything you tell me. Oh, mamma! do you—do you think they will kill us?" she added, with rather a sudden break down of the courage she tried so gallantly to rally.

"Kill us, mademoiselle!" exclaimed the overseer, quaking in every limb. "Oh no! never! They cannot be so bad as that. We will temporise, we will supplicate, we will make terms with them; we will offer freedom, and rum, and plunder; we will go on our knees to their chief, and entreat his mercy!"

The girl looked at him contemptuously. Strange to say, her courage rose as his fell, and she seemed to gather strength and energy from the abject selfishness of his despair. The marquise did not heed him, for she heard Fleurette's footsteps returning, and was herself busied with an oblong wooden case, brassbound and carefully locked up, that she lifted from the recess of a cupboard in the room.

Fleurette's black feet could carry her swiftly and lightly as a bird. She had followed her instructions implicitly, had

crept noiselessly through the kitchen, and advanced unseen to the old summer-house. Peering from that concealment on the moonlit surface of the lawn, she was horror-struck to observe nearly a score of slaves intently watching the house. She hurried back panting to her mistress's presence, and made her discouraging report.

Madame de Montmirail was very grave now. The affair had become more than serious. It was, in truth, desperate. Once again, as she looked at her daughter, came that strange quiver over her features, that shudder of repressed horror rather than pain. It was succeeded, as before, by a moment of deep reflection, and then her eye kindled, her lips tightened, and all her soft voluptuous beauty hardened into the obstinate courage of despair. Cerise sank on her knees to pray, and rose with a pale, serene, undaunted face. Hers was the passive endurance of the martyr. Her mother's the tameless valour of the champion, inherited through a long line of the turbulent La Fiertés, not one of whom had ever blenched from death nor yielded an inch before the face of man.

"Bartoletti!" said the marquise. "Bar the doors and windows; they can be forced with half a dozen strokes, but in war every minute is of value. Hold this rabble in parley as long as you can. I dare not trust you with my pistols, for a weak heart makes a shaking hand, and I think fighting seems less your trade than mine. When you can delay them no longer, arrange your own terms with the villains. It is possible they may spare you for your wife's sake. Quick, man! I hear them coming now. Cerise, our bedroom has a strong oaken door, and they cannot reach the window without a ladder, which leaves us but one enemy to deal with at a time. Courage, my darling! Kiss me! Again, again! my own! And now. A woman dies but once! Here goes for France, and the lilies on the White Flag!"

Thus encouraging her child, the marquise led the way to the bedchamber they jointly occupied, a plainly furnished room, of which the only ornament was the prince-marshal's portrait, already mentioned as having occupied the place of honour in madame's boudoir at the Hôtel Montmirail. Both women glanced at it as they entered the apartment. Then the marquise, laying down the oblong box she carried, carefully shaded the night-lamp that burned by her bedside, and peered stealthily from the window to reconnoitre.

"Four, six, ten," said she calmly, "besides their leader, a tall, big negro, very like Hippolyte. It *is* Hippolyte. *You* at least, my friend, will not leave this house alive! I can

hardly miss so fair a mark as those broad black shoulders. This of course is the *corps d'élite*. Those at the back of the house I do not regard so much. The kitchen door is strong, and they will do nothing if their champions are repulsed. Courage again, my child! All is not lost yet. Open that box and help me to load my pistols. Strange, that I should have practised with them for years, only to beat Madame de Sabran, and now to-night we must both trust our safety to a true eye and a steady hand!"

Pale, tearless, and collected, Cerise obeyed. Her mother, drawing the weapons from their case, wiped them with her delicate handkerchief, and proceeded to charge them carefully, and with a preoccupied air, like a mother preparing medicine for a child. Holding the ramrod between her beautiful white teeth, while her delicate and jewelled fingers shook the powder into the pan, she explained to Cerise the whole mystery of loading and priming the deadly weapons. She would thus, as she observed, always have one barrel in reserve. The younger woman listened attentively. Her lip was steady, though her hand shook, and now that the worst was come she showed that peculiar quality of race which is superior to the common fighting courage possessed indiscriminately by all classes—the passive concentrated firmness, which can take every advantage so long as a chance is left, and die without a word at last, when hope gives place to the resignation of despair. She even pointed out to her mother, that by half closing the shutter, the marquise, herself unseen, could command the approach to the front door.

Then taking a crucifix from her bosom, she pressed it to her lips, and said, "I am ready now, mamma. I am calm. I can do anything you tell me. Kiss me once more, dear, as you used when I was a child. And if we *must* die, it will not seem so hard to die together."

The marquise answered by a long clinging embrace, and then the two women sat them down in the gloomy shadows of their chamber, haggard, tearless, silent, watching for the near approach of a merciless enemy armed with horrors worse than death.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AT BAY

IN obedience to his mistress, Bartoletti had endeavoured to secure the few weak fastenings of the house, but his hands shook so, that without Fleurette's aid not a bolt would have been pushed nor a key turned. The black girl, however, seconded his efforts with skill and coolness, so that Hippolyte's summons to surrender was addressed to locked doors and closed windows. The Coromantee was now so inflamed with rum as to be capable of any outrage, and since neither his band nor himself were possessed of firearms, nothing but Célandine's happy suggestion about the concealed powder restrained him from ordering a few fagots to be cut, and the building set in a blaze. Advancing with an air of dignity, that would at any other time have been ludicrous, and which he would certainly have abandoned had he known that the marquise covered his body with her pistol the while, he thumped the door angrily, and demanded to know why "dis here gentleman comin' to pay compliment to buckra miss" was not immediately admitted; but receiving no answer, proceeded at once to batter the panels with an iron crowbar, undeterred by the expostulations of Fleurette, who protested vehemently, first, that her mistress was engaged with a large party of French officers; secondly, that she lay sick in bed, on no account to be disturbed; and lastly, that neither she nor ma'amselle were in the house at all.

The Coromantee of course knew better. Shouting a horrible oath, and a yet more hideous threat, he applied his burly shoulders to the entrance, and the whole woodwork giving way with a crash, precipitated himself into the passage, followed by the rest of the band, to be confronted by Fleurette alone, Bartoletti having fled ignominiously to the kitchen.

"I could have hit him through the neck," observed the marquise, withdrawing from her post behind the shutter, "but I was too directly above him to make sure, and every charge

is so valuable I would not waste one on a mere wound. My darling, I still hope that two or three deadly shots may intimidate them, and we shall escape after all."

Cerise answered nothing, though her lips moved. The two ladies listened, with every faculty sharpened, every nerve strung to the utmost.

A scream from Fleurette thrilled through them like a blow. Hippolyte, though willing enough to dally with the comely black girl for a minute or two, lost patience with her pertinacity in clinging about him to delay his entrance, and struck her brutally to the ground. Turning fiercely on him where she lay, she made her sharp teeth meet in the fleshy part of his leg, an injury the savage returned with a kick, that after the first shriek it elicited left poor Fleurette stunned and moaning in the corner of the passage, to be crushed and trampled by the blacks, who now poured in behind their leader, elated with the success of this, their first step in open rebellion. Presently, loud shouts, or rather howls of triumph, announced that the overseer's place of concealment was discovered. Bartoletti, pale, or rather yellow, limp, stammering, and beside himself with terror, was dragged out of the house and consigned to sundry ferocious-looking negroes, who proceeded to amuse themselves by alternately kicking, cuffing, and threatening him with instantaneous death.

The marquise listened eagerly; horror, pity, and disgust succeeding each other on her haughty, resolute face. Once, something like contempt swept over it, while she caught the tone of Bartoletti's abject entreaties for mercy. He only asked for life—bare life, nothing more; they might make a slave of him then and there. He was their property, he and his wife, and all that he had, to do what they liked with. Only let him live, he said, and he would join them heart and hand; show them where the rum was kept, the money, the jewels; nay, help them cheerfully to cut every white throat on the island. The man was convulsed with terror, and the negroes danced round like fiends, mocking, jeering, flouting him, exulting in the spectacle of a *buckra* overseer brought so low.

"There is something in race after all," observed the marquise, as if discussing an abstract proposition. "I suppose it is only the *canaille* that can thus degrade themselves from mere dread of death. Though our families have not always *lived* very decently, I am glad to think that there was never yet a Montmirail or La Fierté who did not know how *to die*. My child, it is the pure old blood that carries us

through such moments as these; neither of us is likely to disgrace it now."

Again her daughter's lips moved, although no sound escaped them. Cerise was prepared to die, but she could not bring herself to reason on the advantages of noble birth at such a moment, like the marquise; and indeed the girl's weaker frame and softer heart quailed in terror at the prospect of the ordeal they had to go through.

From their chamber of refuge the two ladies could hear the insulting jests and ribald gibberish of the slaves, now bursting into the sitting-room, breaking the furniture, shivering the mirrors, and wantonly destroying all the delicate articles of use and ornament, of which they could neither understand the purpose nor appreciate the value. Presently a discordant scream from Pierrot announced that the parrot had protested against the intrusion of these riotous visitors, while a shout of pain, followed by loud bursts of laughter, proclaimed the manner in which he had resented the familiarity of one more daring than the rest. Taking the bird roughly off its perch, a stout young negro named Achille had been bitten to the bone, and the cross-cut wound inflicted by the parrot's beak so roused his savage nature, that twisting its neck round with a vindictive howl, he slew poor Pierrot on the spot.

The marquise in her chamber above could hear the brutal acclamations that greeted this exploit, and distinguished the smothered thump of her favourite's feathered body as it was dashed into a corner of the room. Then her lips set tight, her brows knit, and the white hand clenched itself round her pistol, firm, rigid, and pitiless as marble.

Heavy footsteps were now heard hurrying on the stairs, and whispered voices urging contrary directions, but all with the same purport. There seemed to be no thought of compassion, no talk of mercy. Even within hearing of their victims, Hippolyte and Achille, who was his second in command, scrupled not to discuss the fate of the ladies when they should have gained possession of their persons—a fate which turned the daughter's blood to ice, the mother's to fire. It was no time now to think of compromise or capitulation, or aught but selling life at the dearest, and gaining every moment possible by the sacrifice of an enemy.

Even in this last extremity, however, the genius of system, so remarkable in all French minds, did not desert the marquise. She counted the charges in her pistol-case, and calculated the resources of her foes with a cool, methodical appreciation of

the chances for and against her, totally unaffected by the enormous disproportion of the odds. She was good, she argued, for a dozen shots in all. She would allow for two misses; sagely reflecting that in a chance medley like the present she could hardly preserve a steadiness of hand and eye that had heretofore so discomfited Madame de Sabran in the shooting galleries of Marly and Versailles. Eight shots would then be left, exclusive of two that she determined at all risks to reserve for the last. The dead bodies of eight negroes she considered slain by the hand of one white woman, ought to put the whole black population of the island to the rout; but supposing that the rum they had drunk should have rendered them so reckless as to disregard even such a warning, and that, with her defences broke down, she found herself and daughter at their mercy, then—and while the marquise reasoned thus, the blood mounted to her eyes, and a hand of ice seemed to close round her heart—the two reserve shots should be directed with unerring hand, the one into her daughter's bosom, the other through her own.

And Cerise, now that the crisis had arrived at last, in so far as they were to be substantiated by the enforced composure of a passive endurance, fully vindicated her claims to noble blood. She muttered many a prayer indeed, that arose straight from her heart, but her eyes were fixed on her mother the while, and she had disposed the ammunition on a chair beside her in such a manner as to reload for the marquise with rapidity and precision. "We are like a front and rear rank of the Grey Musketeers," said the latter, with a wild attempt at hilarity, in which a strong hysterical tendency, born of over-wrought feelings, was with difficulty kept down. "The affair will soon commence now, and, my child, if worst comes to worst, remember there is no surrender. I hear them advancing to the assault. Courage! my darling. Steady! and *Vive la France!*"

The words were still upon her lips, when a swarm of negroes, crowding and shouldering up the narrow passage, halted at her door. Hippolyte commenced his summons to the besieged by a smashing blow with the crowbar, that splintered one of the panels and set the whole woodwork quivering to its hinges. Then he applied his thick lips to the keyhole, and shouted in brutal glee—

"Time to wake up now, missee! You play 'possum no longer, else cut down gum-tree at one stroke. Wot you say to dis nigger for buckra bridegroom? Time to come out now and dance jigs at um wedding."

There was not a quiver in her voice while the marquise answered in cold imperious tones—

"You are running up a heavy reckoning for this night's work. I know your ringleaders, and refuse to treat with them. Nevertheless, I am not a severe mistress. If the rest of the negroes will go quietly home, and resume their duties with to-morrow's sunrise, I will not be hard upon them. You know me, and can trust my word."

Cheers of derision answered this haughty appeal, and loud suggestions for every kind of cruelty and insult, to be inflicted on the two ladies, were heard bandied about amongst the slaves. Hippolyte replied fiercely—

"Give in at once! Open this minute, or neither of you shall leave the house alive! For the marquise—Achille! I give her to you! For lilly ma'amselle—I marry her this very night. See! before the moon goes down!"

Cerise raised her head in scornful defiance. Her face was livid, but it was stamped with the same expression as her mother's now. There could be no question, both were prepared to die game to the last.

The blows of Hippolyte's crowbar resounded against the strong oaken panels of the door, but the massive woodwork, though it shook and groaned, resisted stoutly for a time. It was well for the inmates that Célandine's imaginative powers had suggested the concealed gunpowder. Had it not been for their fears of an explosion the negroes would ere this have set fire to the building, when no amount of resistance could have longer delayed the fate of the two ladies. Bartoletti, intimidated by the threats of his captors, and preoccupied only with the preservation of his own life, had shown the insurgents where the rum was kept, and many of these were rapidly passing from the reckless to the stupefied stage of intoxication. The Italian, who was not deficient in cunning, encouraged their potations with all his might. He thus hoped to elude them before morning, and leaving his employers to their fate, reach Port Welcome in safety; where he doubted not he should be met by Célandine, whose influence as an Obi-woman, he rightly conjectured, would be sufficient to ensure her safety. A coward rarely meets with the fate he deserves, and Bartoletti did indeed make his eventual escape in the manner he had proposed.

Plying his crowbar with vigorous strokes, Hippolyte succeeded at length in breaking through one of the door panels, a measure to be succeeded by the insertion of hand and arm for withdrawal of the bolts fastened on the inside. The Coro-

mantee possessed, however, a considerable share of cunning mixed with the fierce cruelty of a savage. When he had torn away enough woodwork to make a considerable aperture, he turned to his lieutenant and desired him to introduce his body and unbar the door from within. It is difficult to say what he feared, since even had he been aware that his mistress possessed firearms, he could not have conceived the possibility of her using them so recklessly in a house that he had reason to believe was stored with powder. It was probably some latent dread of the white race that prompted his command to his subordinate.

"You peep in, you black nigger. Ladies all in full dress now. Bow-'ticks rosined and fiddlers dry. Open um door, and ask polite company to walk in."

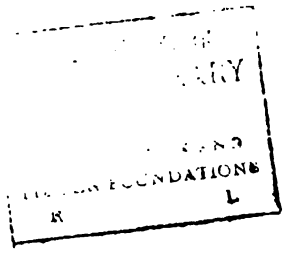
Thus adjured, Achille thrust his woolly head and half his shining black body through the aperture. Madame de Montmirail, standing before her daughter, was not five paces off. She raised her white arm slowly, and covered him with steady aim. Ere his large thick hand had closed round the bolt for which it groped, there was a flash, a loud report, a cloud of smoke curling round the toilet accessories of a lady's bedchamber, and Achille, shot through the brain, fell back stone dead into the passage.

"A little lighter charge of powder, my dear," said the marquise, giving the smoking weapon to her daughter to be reloaded, while she poised its fellow carefully in her hand. "I sighted him *very* fine, and was a trifle over my mark even then. These pistols always throw high at so short a distance."

Then she placed herself in readiness for another enemy, and during a short space waited in vain.

The report of her pistol had been followed by a general scramble of the negroes, who tumbled precipitately downstairs, and in some cases even out of the house, under the impression that every succeeding moment might find them all blown into the air. But the very cause of the besiegers' panic proved, when their alarm subsided, of the utmost detriment to the garrison. Hippolyte, finding himself still in possession of his limbs and faculties, on the same side of the Sulphur Mountain as before, argued, reasonably enough, that the concealed powder was a delusion, and with considerable promptitude at once set fire to the lower part of the house; after which, once more mustering his followers, and encouraging them by his example, he ascended the staircase, and betaking himself to the crowbar with a will, soon battered in

'Covered him with steady aim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the weak defence that alone stood between the ladies and their savage enemies.

Cerise had loaded her mother's pistol to perfection; that mother, roused out of all thought of self by her child's danger, was even now reckoning the last frail chance by which her daughter might escape. During the short respite afforded by the panic of the negroes, they had dragged with desperate strength a heavy chest of drawers, and placed it across the doorway. Even when the latter was forced, this slight breast-work afforded an additional impediment to the assailants.

"You must drop from the window, my child," whispered the marquise, when the shattered door fell in at length across this last obstruction, revealing a hideous confusion of black forms, and rolling eyes, and grinning fiendish faces. "It is not a dozen feet, but mind you turn round so as to light on your hands and knees. Célandine *must* be outside. If you can reach her you are safe. Adieu, darling! I can keep the two foremost from following you, still!"

The marquise grasped a pistol in each hand, but she bent her brow — the haughty white brow that had never been carried more proudly than now—towards her child, and the girl's pale lips clung to it lovingly, while she vowed that neither life nor death should part her from her mother.

"It is all over, dear," she said calmly. "We can but die together as we have lived."

Their case was indeed desperate. The room was already darkening with smoke, and the woodwork on the floor below crackling in the flames that began to light up the lawn outside, and tip with saffron the sleeping woods beyond. The door was broken in; the chest of drawers gave way with a loud crash, and brandishing his crowbar, Hippolyte leaped into the apartment like a fiend, but stood for an instant aghast, rigid, like that fiend turned to bronze, because the white lady, shielding her daughter with her body, neither quailed nor flinched. Her eye was bright, her colour raised, her lips set, her hand steady, her whole attitude resolute and defiant. All this he took in at a glance, and the Coromantee felt his craven heart shrink up to nothing in his breast, thus covered by the deadly pistol of the marquise.

CHAPTER XXXVII

JUST IN TIME

MOMENTS are precious at such a time. The negro, goaded by shame, rage, and alcohol, had drawn his breath for a spring, when a loud cheer was heard outside, followed by two or three dropping shots, and the ring of a hearty English voice exclaiming—

"Hold on, mates! Don't ye shoot wild a-cause of the ladies. It's yardarm to yardarm, this spell, and we'll give these here black devils a taste of the naked steel!"

In another moment Slap-Jack was in the passage, leaving a couple of wounded ruffians on the stairs to be finished by his comrades, and cutting another down across the very door-sill of the marquise's bedchamber. Ere he could enter it, however, his captain had dashed past him, leaping like a panther over the dead negroes under foot, and flashing his glittering rapier in the astonished eyes of the Coromantee, who turned round bewildered from his prey to fight with the mad energy of despair.

In vain. Of what avail was the massive iron crowbar, wielded even by the strength of a Hercules, against the deadliest blade but one in the Great Monarch's bodyguard? A couple of dazzling passes, that seemed to go over, under, all round the clumsier weapon—a stamp—a muttered oath, shut in by clenched, determined teeth, and the elastic steel shot through Hippolyte's very heart, and out on the other side. Spurning the huge black body with his foot, Captain George withdrew his sword, wiped it grimly on the dead man's woolly head, and, uncovering, turned to the ladies with a polite apology for thus intruding under the pressure of so disagreeable a necessity.

He had scarcely framed a sentence ere he became deadly pale, and began to stammer, as if he, too, was under the influence of some engrossing and uncontrollable emotion. The two women had shrunk into the farthest corner of the room. With the prospect of a rescue, Madame de Montmirail's nerves, strung to their utmost tension, had completely given way. In a state of mental and bodily prostration, she had laid her head in the lap of Cerise, whose courage, being of a more passive nature, did not now fail her so entirely.

The girl, indeed, pushing her hair back from her temples, looked wildly in George's face for an instant, like one who wakes from a dream; but the next, her whole countenance lit up with delight, and holding out both hands to him, she exclaimed, in accents of irrepressible tenderness and self-abandonment, "C'est toi!" Then the pale face flushed crimson, and the loving eyes drooped beneath his own. To him she had always been beautiful—most beautiful, perhaps, in his dreams—but never in dreams nor in waking reality so beautiful as now.

He gazed on her entranced, motionless, forgetful of everything in the world but that one loved being restored, as it seemed, by a miracle, at the very time when she had been most lost to him. His stout heart, thrilling to its core from her glance, quailed to think of what must have befallen had he arrived a minute too late, and a prayer went up from it of hearty humble thanksgiving that he was in time. He saw nothing but that drooping form in its delicate white dress, with its gentle feminine gestures and rich dishevelled hair; heard nothing but the accents of that well-remembered voice vibrating with the love that he felt was deep and tender as his own. He was unconscious of the cheers of his victorious boat's crew, of the groans and shrieks uttered by wounded or routed negroes, of the dead beneath his feet, the blazing rafters overhead, the showers of sparks and rolling clouds of smoke that already filled the house; unconscious even of Madame de Montmirail's recovery from her stupor, as she too recognised him, and raising herself with an effort from her daughter's embrace, muttered in deep passionate tones, "C'est lui!"

But it was no time for the exchanges of ceremonious politeness, or the indulgence of softer emotions. The house was fairly on fire, the negroes were up in arms all over the island. A boat's crew, however sturdy, is but a handful of men, and courage becomes foolhardy when it opposes itself

voluntarily at odds of one against a score. Slap-Jack was the first to speak.

"Askin' *your* pardon, ladies," said he, with seamanlike deference to the sex; "the sooner we can clear out of this here the better. If you'll have the kindness to point out your sea-chests, and possibles, and such like, Bottle-Jack here, he'll be answerable for their safety, and me an' my mates we'll run you both down to the beach and have you aboard in a pig's whisper. The island's getting hot, miss," he added confidentially to Cerise, who did not the least understand him. "In these low latitudes, a house afire and a hundred of blacks means a bobbery, just as sure as at home four old women and a goose makes a market!"

"He is right," observed the captain, who had now recovered his presence of mind. "From what I saw as I came along, I fear there is a general rising of the slaves through the whole island. My brigantine, I need not say, is at the disposal of madame and mademoiselle (Cerise thanked him with a look), and I believe that for a time at least it will be the only safe place of refuge."

Thus speaking, he offered his hand to conduct the marquise from the apartment, with as much courtliness and ceremony as though they had been about to dance a minuet at Versailles, under the critical eye of the late king. Hers trembled violently as she yielded it. That hand, so steady but a few minutes ago, while levelling its deadly weapon against the leader of a hundred enemies, now shook as if palsied. How little men understand women. He attributed her discomposure entirely to fright.

There is a second nature, an acquired instinct in the habits of good-breeding, irrepressible even by the gravest emergency. Captain George, conducting Madame de Montmirail down her own blazing staircase, behaved with as ceremonious a politeness as if they had been descending in accordance with etiquette to a formal dinner-party. Cerise, following close, hung no doubt on every word that came from his lips, but it must be confessed the conversation was somewhat frivolous for so important a juncture.

"I little thought," said the captain, performing another courtly bow, "that it was madame la marquise whom I should have the honour of escorting to-night out of this unpleasant little *fracas*. Had I known madame was on the island, she will believe that I should have come ashore and paid my respects to her much sooner."

"You could not have arrived at a more opportune moment,

monsieur," answered the lady, whose strong physical energy and habitual presence of mind were now rapidly reasserting themselves. "You have always been welcome to my receptions; never more so than to-night. You found it a little hot, I fear, and a good deal crowded. The latter disadvantage I was remedying, to the best of my abilities, when you announced yourself. The society, too, was hardly so polite as I could have wished. Oh, monsieur!" she added, in a changed and trembling voice, suddenly discarding the tone of banter she had assumed, "where should we have been now, and what must have become of us, but for you? *You*, to whom we had rather owe our lives than to any man in the world!"

He was thinking of Cerise. He accepted the kind words gratefully, happily; but, like all generous minds, he made light of the service he had rendered.

"You are too good to say so, madame," was his answer. "It seemed to me you were making a gallant defence enough when I came in. One man had already fallen before your aim, and I would not have given much for the life of that ugly giant whom I took the liberty of running through the body without asking permission, although he is probably, like myself, a slave of your own."

The marquise laughed.

"Confess, monsieur," said she, "that I have a steady hand on the pistol. Do you know, I never shot at anything but a playing-card till to-night. It is horrible to kill a man, too. It makes me shudder when I think of it. And yet, at the moment, I had no pity, no scruples—I can even imagine that I experienced something of the wild excitement which makes a soldier's trade so fascinating. I hope it is not so; I trust I may not be so cruel — so unwomanly. But you talk of slaves. Are we not yours? Yours by every right of conquest; to serve and tend you, and follow you all over the world. Ah! it would be a happy lot for her who knew its value!"

The last sentence she spoke in a low whisper and an altered tone, as if to herself. It either escaped him or he affected not to hear. By this time they were out of the house, and standing on the lawn to windward of the flames, which leaped and flickered from every quarter of the building; nor, in escaping from the conflagration, had they by any means yet placed themselves in safety. Captain George and the three trusty Jacks, with half a dozen more stout seamen, constituting a boat's crew, had indeed rescued the ladies, for the moment, from a hideous alternative; but it was more than

doubtful if, even protected by so brave an escort, they could reach the shore unmolested. Bands of negroes, ready to commit every enormity, were ere now patrolling all parts of the island. It was too probable that the few white inhabitants had been already massacred, or, if still alive, would have enough to do to make terms for themselves with the infuriated slaves.

A slender garrison occupied a solitary fort on the other side of the mountains, but so small a force might easily be over-mastered, and even if they had started on the march it was impossible they could arrive for several hours in the vicinity of Port Welcome. By that time the town might well be burned to the ground, and George, who was accustomed to reason with rapidity on the chances and combinations of warfare, thought it by no means unlikely that the ruddy glare, fleeting and wavering on the night-sky over the blazing roof of Montmirail West, might be accepted as a signal for immediate action by the whole of the insurgents. Hippolyte had laid his plans with considerable forethought, the result, perhaps, of many a crafty war-path — many a savage foray in his own wild home. He had so disposed the negroes under his immediate orders, that Madame de Montmirail's house was completely surrounded in every direction by which escape seemed possible. The different egresses leading to the huts, the mills, the cane-pieces, were all occupied, and a strong force was posted on the highroad to Port Welcome, chiefly with a view to prevent the arrival of assistance from that quarter.

One only path was left unguarded; it was narrow, tangled, difficult to find, and wound up through the jungle, across the wildest part of the mountain. By this route he had probably intended to carry off Mademoiselle de Montmirail to some secure fastness of his own. Not satisfied with the personal arrangements he had made for burning the house and capturing the inmates, he had also warned his confederates, men equally fierce and turbulent, if of less intelligence than his own, that they should hold themselves in readiness to take up arms the instant they beheld a glare upon the sky above Cash-a-crou; that each should then despatch a chosen band of twenty stout negroes to himself for orders; and that the rest of their forces should at once commence the work of devastation on their own account, burning, plundering, rioting, and cutting all white throats, without distinction of age or sex.

That this wholesale butchery failed in its details was

owing to no fault of conception, no scruples of humanity on the part of its organiser. The execution fell short of the original design simply because confided to several different heads, acted on by various interests, and all more or less bemused with rum. The ringleader had every reason to believe, that if his directions were carried out he would find himself, ere sunrise, at the head of a general and successful revolt — a black emperor, perhaps, with a black population offering him a crown. But this delusion had been dispelled by one thrust of Captain George's rapier, and the Coromantee's dark body lay charring amongst the glowing timbers of Madame de Montmirail's bedchamber. The dispositions that he had made, however, accounted for the large force of negroes now converging on the burning house. Their shouts might be heard echoing through the woods in all directions. When George had collected his men, surrounded the two ladies by a trusty escort of blue-jackets, and withdrawn his little company, consisting but of a dozen persons, under cover of the trees, he held a council of war as to the best means for securing a rapid retreat. Truth to tell, the skipper would willingly have given the whole worth of her cargo to be once more on her deck, or even under the guns of the *Bashful Maid.*

Slap-Jack gave his opinion unasked.

"Up foresail," said he, with characteristic impetuosity; "run out the guns—double-shotted and depressed; sport every rag of bunting; close in round the convoy; get plenty of way on, and run clean through, exchanging broadsides as we go ahead!"

But Smoke-Jack treated the suggestion with contempt.

"That's wot I call rough-and-tumble fighting, your honour," he grumbled, with a sheepish glance at the ladies; for with all his boasted knowledge of their sex, he was unaccustomed to such specimens as these, and discomfited, as he admitted to himself, by the "trim on 'em." "Them's not games as is fitting for such a company as this here, if I may make so bold. No, no, your honour, it's good advice to keep to windward of a nigger, and it's my opinion as we should weather them on this here tack; get down to the beach with a long leg and a short one—half a mile and more below the town—fire three shots, as agreed on, for the boat, and so pull the ladies aboard on the quiet. After that, we might come ashore again, d'ye see, and have it out comfortable. What say you, Bottle-Jack?"

That worthy turned his quid, and looked preternaturally wise; the more so that the question was somewhat unex-

pected. He was all for keeping the ladies safe, he decided, now they had got them. Captain Kidd always did so, he remembered, and Captain Kidd could sail a ship and fight a ship, etc.; but Bottle-Jack was more incoherent than usual—utterly adrift under the novelty of his situation, and gasping like a gudgeon at the marquise and her daughter, whose beauty seemed literally to take away his breath.

George soon made up his mind.

"Is there any way to the beach," said he, addressing himself rather to Cerise than her mother, "without touching the road to Port Welcome? It seemed to me, as we marched up, that the highroad made a considerable bend. If we could take the string instead of the bow we might save a good deal of time, and perhaps escape observation altogether."

The marquise and her daughter looked at each other helplessly. Had they been Englishwomen, indeed, even in that hot climate, they would probably have known every by-road and mountain path within three leagues of their home; but the ladies of France, though they dance exquisitely, are not strong walkers, and neither of these, during the months they had spent at Cash-a-crou, had yet acquired such a knowledge of the locality as might now have proved the salvation of the whole party.

In this extremity a groan was heard to proceed out of the darkness at a few paces' distance. Slap-Jack, guided by the sound, and parting some shrubs that concealed her, discovered poor Fleurette, more dead than alive, bruised, exhausted, terrified, scarcely able to stand, and shot through the ankle by a chance bullet from the blue-jackets, yet conscious enough still to drag herself to the feet of Cerise and cover them with kisses, forgetting everything else in her joy to find her young mistress still alive.

"You would serve me, Fleurette, I know," said Mademoiselle de Montmirail, in a cautious whisper; for, to her excited imagination, every shrub that glistened in the moonlight held a savage. "I can trust you; I feel it. Tell me, is there no way to the sea but through our enemies? Must we witness more cruelties—more bloodshed? Oh! have we not had fighting and horrors enough?"

The black girl twined herself upwards, like a creeper, till her head was laid against the other's bosom; then she wept in silence for a few seconds ere she could command her voice to reply.

"Trust me, lilly ma'amselle," said she, in a tone of intense feeling that vouched for her truth. "Trust poor Fleurette;

give last drop of blood to help young missee safe. Go to Jumbo for lilly ma'amselle now. Show um path safe across Sulphur Mountain down to seashore. Fleurette walk pretty well tank you, now, if only buckra blue-jacket offer um hand. Not so, sar! Impudent tief!" she added indignantly, as Slap-Jack, thoroughly equal to the occasion, at once put his arm round her waist. "Keep your distance, sar! You only poor foretop-man. Dis good daddy help me along fust."

Thus speaking, she clung stoutly to Bottle-Jack, and proceeded to guide the party up the mountain along a path that she assured them was known but to few of the negroes themselves, and avoided even by these, as being the resort of Jumbo and several other evil spirits much dreaded by the slaves. Of such supernatural terrors, she was good enough to inform them, they need have no fear, for that Jumbo and his satellites were fully occupied to-night in assisting the "bobbery" taking place all over the island; and that even were they at leisure they would never approach a party in the centre of which was walking such an angel of light as Ma'amselle Cerise.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MÈRE AVANT TOUT

THE path was steep and narrow, leading them, moreover, through the most tangled and inaccessible parts of the jungle. Their progress was necessarily tardy and laborious. Fleurette took the lead, supported by Bottle-Jack, whose sea-legs seemed to carry him up-hill with difficulty, and who stopped to take breath more than once. The black girl's wound was painful enough, but she possessed that savage spirit of endurance which successfully resists mere bodily suffering, and walked with an active and elastic, though limping step. Blood, however, was still oozing from her wound, and a sense of faintness, resisted by sheer force of will, threatened at every moment to overpower her. She might just reach the crest of the hill, she thought, and then it would be all over with poor Fleurette; but the rest would need no guide after that point was gained, and the faithful girl struggled on.

Next came Smoke-Jack, in attendance on the ladies, much exhilarated by the dignity of his position, yet ludicrously on his good behaviour, and afraid of committing himself, on the score of manners, by word or deed. The marquise and her daughter walked hand in hand, wasting few words, and busied each with her own thoughts. They seemed to have exchanged characters with the events of the last few hours. Cerise, ever since her rescue, had displayed an amount of energy and resolution scarcely to be expected from her usual demeanour, making light of present fatigue and coming peril in a true military spirit of gaiety and good-humour; while her mother, on the contrary, betrayed in every word and gesture the languor of subdued emotion, and a certain softened, saddened preoccupation of manner, seldom to be remarked in the self-possessed and brilliant marquise.

Captain George, with Slap-Jack and the rest of the blue-jackets, brought up the rear. His fighting experience warned him that in no previous campaign had he ever found himself

in so critical a position as at present. He was completely surrounded by the enemy. His own force, though well-armed and full of confidence, was ridiculously weak in numbers. He was encumbered with baggage (not to speak it disrespectfully) that must be protected at any sacrifice, and he had to make a forced march, through ground of which he was ignorant, dependent on the guidance of a half-savage girl, who might after all turn out to be a traitress. Under so many disadvantages, the former captain of musketeers showed that he had not forgotten his early training. All eyes and ears, he seemed to be everywhere at once, anticipating emergencies, multiplying precautions, yet finding a moment every now and then for a word of politeness and encouragement to the ladies, to regret the roughness of the path, to excuse the prospective discomforts of the brigantine, or to assure them of their speedy arrival in a place of safety. On these occasions he invariably directed his speech to the marquise and his looks to her daughter.

Presently, as they continued to wind up the hill, the ascent grew more precipitous. At length, having crossed the bed of a rivulet that they could hear tumbling into a cascade many hundred feet below, they reached a pass on the mountain-side where the path became level, but seemed so narrow as to preclude further progress. It turned at a sharp angle round the bare face of a cliff, which rose on one side sheer and perpendicular several fathoms above their heads, and on the other shelved as abruptly into a dark abyss, the depth of which, not one even of the seamen, accustomed as they were to giddy heights, dared measure with his eye. Fleurette alone, standing on the brink, peered into it without wavering, and pointing downwards, looked back on the little party with triumph.

"See down there," said she, in a voice that grew fainter with every syllable. "No road round up above; no road round down below. Once past here all safe, same as in bed at home. Come by, you! take hands one by one—so—small piece more—find white lagoon. All done then. Good-night!"

Holding each other by the hand, the whole party, to use Slap-Jack's expression, "rounded the point" in safety. They now found themselves in an open and nearly flat space, encircled but unshadowed by the jungle. Below them, over a level of black tree-tops, the friendly sea was shining in the moonlight; and nearer yet, a gleam through the dark mass of forest denoted that white lagoon of which Fleurette had spoken.

On any other night it would have been a peaceful and a lovely sight; but now a flickering glare on the sky showed them where the roof-tree of Montmirail West was burning into ashes, and the yells of the rioters could be heard, plainer and plainer, as they scoured the mountain in pursuit of the fugitives, encouraging each other in their search. Some of these shouts sounded so near in the clear still night, that Captain George was of opinion their track had been already discovered and followed up. If this were indeed the case, no stand could be made so effectually as at the defile they had lately threaded, and he determined to defend it to the last. For this purpose he halted his party and gave them their directions.

"Slap-Jack," said he, "I've got a bit of soldier's work for you to do. It's play to a sailor, but you attend to my orders all the same. If these black devils overhaul us, they can only round that corner one at a time. I'll leave you with a couple of your own foretop-men here to stop *that* game. But we soldiers never want to fight without a support. Smoke-Jack and the rest of the boat's crew will remain at your back. What say ye, my lads? It will be something queer if you can't hold a hundred darkies and more in such a post as this, say, for three-quarters of an hour. I don't ask ye for a minute longer; but mind ye, I expect *that*, if not a man of you ever comes on board again. When you've killed all the niggers, make sail straight away to the beach, fire three shots, and I'll send a boat off. You won't want to break your leave after to-night's work. At all events, I wouldn't advise you to try, and I shall get the anchor up soon after sunrise. Bottle-Jack comes with me, in case the ladies should want more assistance, and this dark girl—what d'ye call her?—Fleurette, to show us the way. God bless ye, my lads! Keep steady, level low, and don't pull till you see the whites of their eyes!"

Bottle-Jack, slewing his body about with more than customary oscillation, declared his willingness to accompany the captain, but pointing to Fleurette, expressed a fear that "this here gal had got a megrim or something, and wanted caulkin' very bad, if not refittin' altogether in dry dock." The moon shed a strong light upon the little party, and it was obvious that Fleurette, who had now sunk to the ground, with her head supported by Bottle-Jack as tenderly and carefully as if the honest tar had been an experienced nurse of her own sex, was seriously, if not mortally wounded, and certainly unable to proceed. The marquise and her daughter

were at her side in an instant, but she took no heed of the former, fixing her filmy eyes on Cerise, and pressing her young mistress's hand to her heart.

"You kiss me once again," said she faintly, and with a sad smile on her swarthy face, now turning to that wan leaden hue which makes a pale negro so ghastly an object. "Once again, so sweet! ma'amselle, same as before. You go straight on to white lagoon—see! Find canoe tied up. Stop here berry well, missee—Fleurette camp out all night. No fear Jumbo now. Sleep on long after monkeys wake. Good-night!"

It was with difficulty that Cerise could be prevailed on to leave the faithful girl who had sacrificed herself so willingly, and whom, indeed, she could hardly expect to see again; but the emergency admitted of no delay, even on the score of gratitude and womanly compassion. George hurried the ladies forward in the direction of the lagoon, leaving Fleurette, now prostrate and unconscious, to the care of Slap-Jack, who pitied her from the depths of his honest heart.

"It's a bad job," said he, taking off his jacket and folding it into a pillow for the poor girl's head, with as much tender care as if she had been his own Alice, of whom, indeed, he was thinking at the moment. "A real bad job, if ever there was one. Such a heart of oak as this here; an' a likely lass too, though as black as a nor'-easter. Well, *somebody* 'll have to pay for this night's work, that's sartin. Ay! yell away, you black beggars. We'll give you something to sing out for presently—an' you shall have it hot and heavy when you *do* get it, as sure as my name's Slap-Jack!"

Captain George, in the meantime, led the two ladies swiftly down the open space before them, in the direction of the lagoon, which was now in sight. They had but to thread one more belt of lofty forest-trees, from which the wild vines hung in a profusion of graceful festoons, and they were on the brink of the cool, peaceful water, spread like a sheet of silver at their feet.

"Five minutes more," said he, "and we are safe. Once across, and if that girl speaks truth, less than a quarter of a league will bring us to the beach. All seems quiet, too, on this side, and there is little chance of our being intercepted from the town. The boat will be in waiting within a cable's length off shore, and my signal will bring her in at once. Then I shall hope to conduct you safe on board, but both madame and mademoiselle must excuse a sailor's rough accommodation and a sailor's unceremonious welcome."

The marquise did not immediately answer. She was looking far ahead into the distance, as though she heard not, or at least heeded not, and yet every tone of his voice was music to her ears, every syllable he spoke curdled like some sweet and subtle poison in her blood. Notwithstanding the severe fatigue and fierce excitement of the night, she walked with head erect, and proud imperious step, like a queen amongst her courtiers, or an enchantress in the circle she has drawn. There was a wild brilliancy in her eyes, there was a fixed red spot on either cheek; but for all her assumption of pride, for all her courage and all her self-command, her hand trembled, her breath came quick, and the marquise knew that she had never yet felt so thoroughly a weak and dependent woman as now, when she turned at last to thank her preserver for his noble efforts, and dared not even raise her eyes to meet his own.

"You have saved us, monsieur," was all she could stammer out, "and how can we show our gratitude enough? We shall never forget the moment of supreme danger, nor the brave man who came between those ruffians and their prey. Shall we, Cerise?"

But Cerise made no answer, though she managed to convey her thanks in some hidden manner that afforded Captain George a satisfaction quite out of proportion to their value.

They had now reached the edge of the lagoon, to find, as Fleurette had indicated, a shallow rickety canoe, moored to a post half-buried in the water, worm-eaten, rotten, and crumbling to decay. The barque itself was in little better preservation, and on a near inspection they discovered, much to their discomfiture, that it would hold at best but one passenger at a time. It had evidently not been used for a considerable period, and after months of exposure and ill-usage, without repair, was indeed, as a means of crossing the lagoon, little better than so much brown paper. George's heart sank while he inspected it. There was no paddle, and although such a want might easily be remedied with a knife and the branch of a tree, every moment of delay seemed so dangerous, that the captain made up his mind to use another method of propulsion, and cross over at once.

"Madame," said he to the marquise, "our only safety is on the other side of this lagoon. Fifty strokes of a strong swimmer would take him there. No paddle has been left in that rickety little craft, nor dare I waste the few minutes

it would take to fashion one. Moreover, neither mademoiselle nor yourself could use it, and you need only look at your shallop to be sure that it would never carry two. This, then, is what I propose. I will place one of you in the canoe, and swim across, pushing it before me. Bottle-Jack will remain here to guard the other. For that purpose I will leave him my pistols in addition to his own. When my first trip is safely accomplished, I will return with the canoe and repeat the experiment. The whole can be done in a short quarter of an hour. Excuse me, madame, but for this work I must divest myself of coat, cravat, and waistcoat."

Thus speaking, Captain George disencumbered himself rapidly of these garments, and assisted by Bottle-Jack, tilted the light vessel on its side, to get rid of its superfluous weight of water. Then standing waist-deep in the lagoon, he prepared it for the reception of its freight; no easy matter with a craft of this description, little more roomy and substantial than a cockle-shell, without the advantage of being watertight. Spreading his laced coat along the bottom of the canoe, he steadied it carefully against the bank, and signed to the ladies that all was now in readiness for embarkation. They exchanged wistful looks. Neither seemed disposed to grasp at her own safety and leave the other in danger. Bottle-Jack, leaning over the canoe, continued bailing the water out with his hand. Notwithstanding the captain's precautions it leaked fast, and seemed even now little calculated to land a passenger dry on the farther shore.

"Mamma, I will not leave you," said Cerise, "you shall go first with George. With monsieur, I mean." She corrected herself, blushing violently. "Monsieur can then return for me, and I shall be quite safe with this good old man, who is, you perceive, armed to the teeth, and as brave as a lion besides."

"That is why I do not fear to remain," returned the marquise. "Child, I could not bear to see this sheet of water between us, and you on the dangerous side. We can neither fly nor swim, alas! Cerise, I *insist* on your crossing first. It may be the last command I shall ever lay upon you."

But Cerise was still obstinate, and the canoe meanwhile filled fast, in spite of Bottle-Jack's exertions. That worthy, whose very nose was growing pale, though not with fear, took no heed of their dilemma, but continued his task with a mechanical, half-stupefied persistency, like a man under the influence of opium. The quick eye of the marquise had

detected this peculiarity of manner, and it made her the more determined not to leave her daughter under the old seaman's charge. Their dispute might have been protracted till even Captain George's courtesy would have given way; but a loud yell from the defile they had lately quitted, followed by a couple of shots and a round of British cheers, warned them all that not a moment was to be lost, for that their retreat was even now dependent on the handful of brave men left behind to guard the pass.

"My daughter shall go first, monsieur? Is it not so?" exclaimed the marquise, with an eagerness of eye and excitement of manner she had not betrayed in all the previous horrors of the night.

"It is better," answered George. "Mademoiselle is perhaps somewhat the lightest."

And although he strove to make his voice utterly unmoved and indifferent, there was in its tone a something of intense relief, of deep, heartfelt joy, that told its own tale. The marquise knew it all at last. She saw the past now, not piece by piece, in broken detail as it had gone by, but all at once, as the mariner, sailing out of a fogbank, beholds the sunny sky, and the blue sea, and the purple outlines of the shore. It came upon her as a shot goes through a wild deer. The creature turns sick and faint, and knowing all is over, yet would fain ignore its hurt and keep its place, erect, stately, and uncomplaining, amongst the herd; not the less surely has it got its death-wound.

How carefully he placed Cerise in the frail barque of which she was to be the sole occupant. How tenderly he drew the laced coat between the skirt of her delicate white dress and the flimsy shattered woodwork, worn, splintered, and dripping wet even now. Notwithstanding the haste required, notwithstanding that every moment was of such importance in this life and death voyage, how he seemed to linger over the preparations that brought him into contact with his precious freight. At last they were ready. A farewell embrace between mother and daughter; a husky cheer delivered in a whisper from Bottle-Jack; a hurried thanksgiving for perils left behind; an anxious glance at the opposite shore, and the canoe floated off with its burden, guided by George, who in a few yards was out of his depth and swimming onward in long measured strokes that pushed it steadily before him.

The marquise, watching their progress with eager restless glance, that betrayed strong passions and feelings kept down

by a stronger will, observed that when within a pistol-shot of the opposite shore the barque was propelled swiftly through the water, as if the swimmer exerted himself to the utmost—so much so as to drive it violently against the bank. George's voice, while his dripping figure emerged into sight, warned her that all was well; but straining her eyes in the uncertain light, the marquise, though she discerned her daughter's white dress plainly enough, could see nothing of the boat. Again George shouted, but she failed to make out the purport of what he said; though a gleam of intelligence on the old seaman's face made her turn to Bottle-Jack.

"What is it?" she asked anxiously. "Why does he not come back to us with the canoe?"

"The canoe will make no more voyages, my lady," answered the old man, with a grim leer that had in it less of mirth than pain. "She's foundered, that's wot she's been an' done. They'll send back for us, never fear; so you an' me will keep watch and watch till they come; an' if you please, my lady, askin' your pardon, I'll keep *my* watch first."

sow plenty of flowers in that prolific soil which is fertilised by the heart's sunshine and watered by its tears — plenty of flowers, the brighter, the sweeter, the more fragile, perhaps, the better. Winter may cut them down indeed to the cold earth, yet springtime brings another crop as fair, as fresh, as fragile, and as easily replaced as those that bloomed before. But it is unwise to plant a tree; because, if that tree be once torn up by the roots, the flowers will never grow over the barren place again!

The marquise had not indeed *planted* the tree, but she had allowed it unwittingly to grow. Perhaps she would never have confessed its existence to herself had it not thus been forcibly torn away by roots that had for years twined deeper and deeper among all its gentlest and all its strongest feelings, till they had become as the very fibres of her heart. It is needless to say that the marquise was a woman elevated both by disposition and education above the meaner and pettier weaknesses of her sex. If she was masculine in her physical courage and moral recklessness of consequence, she was masculine also in a certain generosity of spirit and noble disdain for anything like malice or foul play. Jealousy with her—and, like all strong natures, she could feel jealousy very keenly—would never be visited on the object that had caused it. She would hate and punish herself under the torture; she might even be goaded to hate and punish the man at whose hands she was suffering; but she would never have injured the woman whom he preferred, and, indeed, supported by a scornful pride, would have taken a strange morbid pleasure in enhancing her own pain by ministering to that woman's happiness. Therefore she was saved a keen pang now—a pang that might have rendered her agony too terrible to endure. She had not concealed from herself to-night that the thrill of delight she experienced from the arrival of succour was due rather to the person who brought it than to the assistance itself; but almost ere she had time to realise its charm the illusion had been dispelled, and she felt that, dream as it all was, she had been wakened ere she had time to dream it out. And now it seemed to her that nothing would be so good as the excitement of another skirmish, another struggle, and a sudden death, with the cheers of these brave Englishmen ringing in her ears—a death that Cerise would never forget had been encountered for her safety; George, too, would sometimes remember that, and remembering, accord a smile and a sigh to the beauty he had neglected, and the devotion he had never known till too late.

Engrossed with such thoughts, the marquise was less alive than usual to surrounding impressions. Presently a deep groan, forced from her companion by combined pain and weakness, against which the sufferer could no longer hold out, roused her to a sense of her situation, which was indeed sufficiently precarious to have warranted much anxiety and alarm. Hastening to his side, she was shocked to perceive that Bottle-Jack had sunk to the ground, and was now endeavouring ineffectually to support himself on his knees in an attitude of vigilance and defence. The captain's pistols lay beside him, and he carried his own in each hand, but his glazing eye and fading colour showed that the weapons could be but of little service, and the time seemed fast approaching when the old sailor should be relieved from his duty by an order against which there was no appeal.

The marquise had scarcely listened to the words while he spoke them, but they came back now, and she understood what he meant when he told her that, if she pleased, "he would keep *his* watch first." She looked around and shuddered. It was, indeed, a cheerless position enough. The moon was sinking, and that darkest hour of the night approached which is followed by dawn, just as sorrow is succeeded by consolation, and death by immortality. The breeze struck damp and chill on her unprotected neck and bosom, for there had been no time to think of cloaks or shawls when she escaped, nor was the air sufficiently cold before midnight to remind her of such precautions. The surrounding jungle stirred and sighed faintly, yet sadly, in the night air. The waters of the deep lagoon, now darkening with a darkening sky, lapped drearily against their bank. Other noises were there none, for the rioters seemed to have turned back from the resistance offered by Slap-Jack with his comrades, and to have abandoned for the present their search in that direction. The seamen who guarded the defile were peering stealthily into the gloom, not a man relaxing in his vigilance, not a man stirring on his post. The only sounds that broke her solitude were the restless movements of Bottle-Jack, and the groans that would not be suppressed. It was no wonder the marquise shuddered. She stooped over the old seaman, and took his coarse, heavy hand in hers. Even at such an extremity, Bottle-Jack seemed conscious of the contrast, and touched it delicately, like some precious and fragile piece of porcelain.

"I fear you are hurt," said she, in his own language, which she spoke with the measured accent of her country-

women. "Tell me what it is; I am not a bad doctor myself."

Bottle-Jack tried to laugh.

"It's a flea-bite, my lady," said he, setting his teeth to conceal the pain he suffered. "'Tis but a poke in the side after all, though them black beggars does grind their spear-heads to an edge like a razor. It's betwixt wind and water, d'ye see, marm, if I may be so bold, and past caulking, in my opinion. I'm a-fillin' fast, that's where it is, askin' your pardon again for naming it to a lady like you."

She partly understood him, and for the first time to-night the tears came into her eyes. They did her good. They seemed to clear her faculties and cool her brain. She examined the old man's hurt, after no small resistance on his part, and found a deep wound between his ribs, which even her experience warned her must be mortal. She stanched it as well as she could, tearing up the lace and other trimmings of her dress to form a temporary bandage. Then she bent down to the lagoon to dip her coroneted handkerchief in water and lay it across his brow, while she supported his sinking frame upon her knees. He looked in her face with a puzzled, wandering gaze, like a man in a dream. The vision seemed so unreal, so impossible, so unlike anything he had ever seen before, Bottle-Jack began to think he had reached Fiddler's Green at last.

The minutes dragged slowly on. The sky became darker, the breeze colder, and the strangely matched pair continued in the same position on the brink of the white lagoon, the marquise dipping her handkerchief at short intervals, and moistening the sailor's mouth. It was all she could do for him, and like a faithful old dog, wounded to the death, he could only thank her with his eyes. More than once she thought he was gone, but as moment after moment crept by, so sad, so slow, she knew he was still alive.

Would it never be day? She could scarcely see him now, though his heavy head rested on her knees, though her hand with the moistened handkerchief was laid on his very lips. At last the breeze freshened, sighing audibly through the tree-tops, which were soon dimly seen swaying to and fro against a pale streak of sky on the horizon. Bottle-Jack started and sat up.

"Stand by!" he exclaimed, looking wildly round. "You in the fore-chains! Keep your axe ready to cut away when she rounds to. Easy, lads! She'll weather it now, and I'll go below and turn in."

Then he laid his head once more on Madame de Montmirail's knees, like a child who turns round to go to sleep.

The grey streak had grown to a wide rent of pale green, now broadening and brightening into day. Ere the sky was yet flecked with crimson, or the distant tree-tops tinged with golden fire, the life of the whole jungle was astir, waking the discords of innumerable menageries. Cockatoos whistled, monkeys chattered, parrots screamed, mocking-birds reproduced these and a thousand other sounds a thousandfold. All nature seemed renewed, exulting in the freshened energies of another day, but still the marquise sat by the lagoon, pale, exhausted, worn out, motionless, with the dead seaman's head in her lap.

CHAPTER XL

HOMEWARD BOUND

"BUT, madame, I am as anxious as you can be! Independent of my own feelings—and judge if they be not strong—the brigantine should not lie here another hour. After last night's work, it will not be long before a Spanish man-of-war shows herself in the offing, and I have no desire that our papers should be overhauled, now when my cruise is so nearly finished. I tell you, my dearest wish is to have it settled, and weigh with the next tide."

Captain George spoke from his heart, yet the marquise seemed scarcely satisfied. Her movements were abrupt and restless, her eyes glittered, and a fire as of fever burned in her cheeks, somewhat wasted with all her late excitement and suspense. For the first time, too, he detected silver lines about the temples, under those heavy black locks that had always seemed to him only less beautiful than her child's.

"Not a moment must be lost," said she, "not a moment—not a moment," and repeating her words, walked across the deck to gaze wistfully over the side on Port Welcome, with its white houses glistening in the morning sun. They were safe on board the *Bashful Maid*, glad to escape with life from the successful revolt that had burned Montmirail West to the ground, and destroyed most of the white people's property on the island. Partly owing to its distance from the original scene of outbreak, partly from its lying under the very guns of the brigantine, of which the tonnage and weight of metal had been greatly exaggerated by the negroes, Port Welcome was yet standing, but its black population were keeping high holiday, apparently masters of the situation, and its white residents crept about in fear and trembling, not knowing how much longer they might be allowed to call their very lives their own. It had been a memorable night, a night of murder and rapine, and horror and dismay. Few escaped so well as Madame de Montmirail and her daughter. None indeed had the advantage of such a rescue. The negroes

who tracked them into the bush, and who had delayed their departure to appropriate such plunder as they could snatch from the burning house, or to drink from its cellars success to the revolt, only reached that defile through which the fugitives were guided by Fleurette after these had passed by. The disappointed pursuers were there received by a couple of shots from Slap-Jack and his shipmates, which drove them back in disorder, yelling, boasting, vowing vengeance, but without any thought of again placing themselves in danger of lead or steel. In the death of Hippolyte, the revolt had lost its chief, and became from that moment virtually a failure. The Coromantee was the only negro concerned really capable of directing such a movement; and when his leadership was disposed of by a rapid thrust from Captain George's rapier, the whole scheme was destined to fall to pieces of itself, after the reaction which always follows such disorders had taken place, and the habits of everyday life began to reassert themselves. In the meantime, the blacks had more congenial amusements in store than voluntary collision with an English boat's crew, and soon desisted from a search through the jungle, apparently as troublesome and hazardous as a hunt for a hornet's nest. By sunrise, therefore, Slap-Jack was able to draw off his party from their post, and fall back to where the marquise sat watching by the dead seaman, on the brink of the lagoon. Nor was Bottle-Jack the only victim of their escape, for poor Fleurette had already paid the price of her fidelity with her life.

A strong reinforcement from the *Bashful Maid*, led by her captain in person, who had returned at once, after placing Cerise in safety, enabled Madame de Montmirail and her defenders to take the highroad to Port Welcome in defiance of all opposition. They therefore rounded the lagoon at once, and proceeding by an easier route than that which her daughter followed, reached the quay at their leisure, thence to embark on board the brigantine unmolested by the crowds of rioters with whom the town was filled. Therefore it was that Madame de Montmirail now found herself on the deck of the *Bashful Maid*, urging with a strange persistency, unusual and even unbecoming in a mother, Captain George's immediate marriage to her child, who was quietly sleeping off the night's fatigues below.

"There is the chapel, madame," said George, pointing to the little white edifice that stood between the lighthouse and the town, distinguished by a cross that surmounted its glistening roof, "and here is the bride, safe, happy, and I

hope sound asleep beneath the very spot where we are standing. I know not why there should be an hour's delay, if indeed the priest have not taken flight. There must have been a prospect of martyrdom last night, which he would scarce wish to inspect too closely. Ah! madame, I may seem cold and undemonstrative, but if you could look into my heart you would see how happy I am!"

His voice and manner carried with them a conviction not to be disputed. It probed the marquise to the quick, and true to her character, she pressed the instrument deeper and deeper into the wound.

"You love her then, monsieur?" she said, speaking very clearly and distinctly through her set teeth. "You love her as a woman must be loved if she would be happy—unreservedly, with your whole heart?"

"I love her so well," he answered, "that I only ask to pass my life in contributing to her happiness. Mine has been a rude wild career, in many scenes and many countries. I have lived *in* society and *out of* society, afloat and ashore, at bivouac fires and Court receptions, yet I have always carried the portrait of that one gentle loving face printed on my heart."

"I compliment you on your constancy," she answered, rather bitterly. "Such gallants have been very rare of late both at the old and new Courts. You must have seen other women too, as amiable, as beautiful, who could have loved you perhaps as well."

Something like a sigh escaped her with the concluding sentence, but there is no egotist like a happy lover, and he was too preoccupied with his own thoughts to perceive it. Smiling in his companion's face, with the old honest expression that reminded her of what he had been as a boy, he took her hand and kissed it affectionately.

"Madame," said he, "shall I make you a frank avowal? Ever since I was a wild page at Versailles, and you were so kind to me, I have believed in Madame de Montmirail as my ideal of all that woman should be, and perhaps might never have loved Cerise so well had she not resembled her mother."

The marquise was not without plenty of self-command, but she wanted it all now. Under pretence of adjusting her glove, she snatched away the hand he held, that he might not feel it tremble, and forced herself to laugh while she replied lightly—

"You are complimentary, monsieur, but your compliments are somewhat out of date. An old woman, you know, does

not like to be reminded of her age, and you were, yes, I honestly confess you were, a dear, mischievous, good-looking, good-for-nothing boy in that far-off time so long ago. But all this is nothing to the purpose. Let us send ashore at once to the priest. The ceremony may take place at noon, and I can give the young couple my blessing before wishing them good-bye."

"How, madame?" replied he, astonished. "You will surely accompany us? You will return with us to Europe? You will never trust yourself amongst these savages again, after once escaping out of their hands?"

"I shall be safe enough when the garrison has crossed the mountain," she answered, "and that must be in a few hours, for they are probably even now on the march. Till then I will take refuge with the Jesuits on their plantation at Maria Galante. I do not think all my people can have rebelled. Some of them will escort me faithfully as far as that. No, monsieur, the La Fiertés have never been accustomed to abandon a post of danger, and I shall not leave the island until this rising has been completely put down."

She spoke carelessly, almost contemptuously, but she scarcely knew what she said. Her actual thoughts, had she allowed herself to utter them, would have thus framed themselves: "Can there be anything so blind, so heartless, so self-engrossed—shall I say it?—so entirely and hopelessly *stupid* as a man?"

It was not for George to dispute her wishes. Though little given to illusions, he could scarcely believe that he was not dreaming now, so strange did it seem to have achieved in the last twelve hours that which had hitherto formed the one engrossing object of his life, prized, coveted, dwelt on the more that it looked almost impossible of fulfilment. There was but one drawback to his joy, one difficulty left, perplexing indeed, although simple, and doubly annoying because others of apparently far greater moment had been surmounted. There was no priest to be found in Port Welcome! The good old Portuguese curé who took spiritual charge of the white inhabitants, and such negroes as could be induced to pay attention to his ministering, had been nearly frightened out of his wits by the outbreak. This quiet meek old man, who, since he left his college forty years before, had never known an excitement or anxiety greater than a visit from his bishop or a blight in his plantain-ground, now found himself surrounded by swarms of drunken and infuriated slaves, yelling for his life. It was owing to the presence of mind shown by an old

coloured woman who lived with him as housekeeper, and to no energy or activity of his own, that he made his escape. She smuggled him out of the town through a by-street, and when he had once got his mule into an amble he never drew rein till he reached the Jesuits' establishment at Maria Galante, where he found a qualified welcome and a precarious refuge. From this shelter, defenceless and uncertain as it was, nothing would induce him to depart till the colours of a Spanish three-decker were flying in the harbour, and ere such an arrival could restore confidence to the colony it would behove the *Bashful Maid* to spread her wings and flee away.

Captain George was at his wits' end. In such a dilemma he bethought him of consulting his second in command. For this purpose he went below to seek Beaudésir, and found him keeping guard at the cabin-door within which Mademoiselle de Montmirail was reposing, a post he had held without stirring since she came on board before dawn, and was confided by the captain to his care. He had not spoken to her, he had not even seen her face; but from that moment he had exchanged no words with his comrades, standing as pale, as silent, and almost as motionless as a statue. He started violently when the captain spoke, and collected his faculties with an obvious effort. George could not but observe his preoccupation.

"I am in a difficulty," said the latter, "as I have already told you more than once. Try and comprehend me. I do not often ask for advice, but I want yours now."

"You shall have it at any cost," replied the other. "Do not I owe everything in the world to you?"

"Listen," continued George. "The young lady whom my honest fellows rescued last night, and whom I brought on board, is—is—Mademoiselle de Montmirail herself."

"I know—I know," answered Beaudésir impatiently. "At least, I mean you mentioned it before."

"Very likely," returned the captain, "though I do not remember it. Well, it so happens, you see, that this is the same young lady—the person—the individual—in short, I have saved the woman of all others who is most precious to me in the world."

"Of course—of course," repeated Beaudésir impatiently, "she cannot go back—she *shall* not go back amongst those wretches. She must stay on board. You must take her to Europe. There should be no delay. You must be married—now—immediately—within two hours—before we get the anchor up."

He seemed strangely eager, restless, excited. Without actually acknowledging it, George felt instinctively that something in his friend's manner reminded him of the marquise.

"There is a grave difficulty," said the captain. "Where can we find a priest? That fat little Portuguese who looked like a guinea-pig is sure to have run away, if the negroes have not cut his throat."

The other reflected, his pale face turning paler every moment. Then he spoke, in a low determined voice—

"My captain, there is a Society of Jesuits on the island; I know it for certain; do not ask me why. I have never failed you, have I? Trust me yet this once. Order a boat to be manned; I will go ashore instantly; follow in an hour's time with a strong guard; bring your bride with you; I will undertake that everything shall be ready at the chapel, and a priest in waiting to perform the ceremony."

George looked him straight in the face.

"You are a true friend," said he, and gave him his hand.

The other bent over it as if he would have put it to his lips, and when he raised his head again his eyes were full of tears. He turned away hastily, sprang on deck, and in five minutes the boat was lowered and Beaudésir over the side.

George tapped humbly at the cabin door, and a gentle face, pale but lovely, peeped out to greet him. After his whisper the face was anything but pale, and although the little monosyllable "No" was repeated again and again in that pleading, yielding tone which robs the negative of all its harshness, the boon he begged must have been already nearly accorded if there be any truth in the old Scottish proverb which affirms that "Nineteen nay-says make half a grant." In less than two hours the bridal procession was formed upon the quay, guarded by some score of stalwart, weather-beaten tars, and presenting an exceedingly formidable front to the crowds of grinning negroes who were idling in the sun, talking over the events of the past night, and congratulating themselves that no such infliction as field-work was ever to be heard of in the island again.

It was a strange and picturesque wedding, romantic enough in appearance and reality to have satisfied the wildest imagination. Smoke-Jack and certain athletic able seamen marched in front; Slap-Jack and his foretop-men brought up the rear. In the centre walked the marquise and her daughter, accompanied by the bridegroom. Four deep on each side were the special attendants of the bride, reckless in gait, free in manner, bronzed, bearded, broad-shouldered, and armed to the teeth,

yet cherishing perhaps as deep a devotion for her whom they attended to the altar as could have been entertained by the fairest bevy of bridesmaids that ever belonged to her own sex.

Cerise was very grave and very silent; happy indeed beyond expression, yet a little frightened at the extent as at the suddenness of her own happiness. It seemed so strange to be besieged, rescued, carried off by a lover, and married to him, all within twenty-four hours. The marquise, on the contrary, was gay, talkative, brilliant, full of life and spirits; more beautiful too than usual, in the bright light of that noonday sun. Slap-Jack, who considered himself no mean judge of such matters, was much distracted by the conflict in his own mind as to whether, under similar circumstances, he would have chosen the mother or the child.

Taking little notice of the crowd who followed at a respectful distance, having received from the free-handed sailors several very intelligible hints not to come too near, the bridal procession moved steadily through the outskirts of the town and ascended the hill on which the chapel stood. Halting at its door, the crew formed a strong guard to prevent interruption, and the principal performers, accompanied only by Smoke-Jack, Slap-Jack, and the marquise, entered the building. There were flowers on the altar, with wax tapers already lighted, and everything seemed prepared for the ceremony. A priest, standing with his back to them, was apparently engaged in putting a finishing touch to the decorations when they advanced. Cerise, bewildered, frightened, agitated, clung to her mother's arm.

"Courage, my child," said the marquise, "it will soon be over, and you need never do this again!"

There was something in the voice so hard, so measured, so different from its usual tone, that the girl glanced anxiously in her face. It betrayed no symptoms of emotion, not even the little flutter of maternal pride and anxiety natural to the occasion. It was flushed, imperious, defiant, and strangely beautiful. Slap-Jack entertained no longer the slightest doubt of its superiority to any face he had ever seen. And yet no knightly visor, no Eastern *yashmak* ever concealed its real wearer more effectually than that lovely mask which she forced to do her bidding, though every muscle beneath was quivering in pain the while.

Nor was the marquise the only person under this consecrated roof who curbed unruly feelings with a strong and merciless hand. That priest, with his back to the little con-

gregation, adjusting with trembling gestures the sacred symbols of his faith, had fought during the last hour or two such a battle as a man can only fight once in a lifetime; a battle that, if lost, yields him a prey to evil without hope of rescue; if won, leaves him faint, exhausted, bleeding, a maimed and shattered champion for the rest of his earthly life. Since sunrise he had wrestled fiercely with sin and self. They had helped each other lustily to pull him down, but he had prevailed at last. Though one insuperable barrier already existed between himself and the woman he loved so madly at the cost of his very soul, it was hard to rear another equally insurmountable, with his own hand; but it would ensure her happiness—he resolved to do it, and therefore he was here. So when Cerise and her lover advanced to the altar, and the Jesuit priest whom they had imagined to be a stranger from Maria Galante turned round to confront them, in spite of his contracted features, in spite of the wan, death-like hue of his face, they recognised him at once, and exclaimed simultaneously, in accents of intense surprise, "Brother Ambrose!" and "Beaudésir!"

The sailors, too much taken aback to speak, gasped at each other in mute astonishment, nor did Slap-Jack, who had constituted himself in a manner director of the proceedings, recover his presence of mind till the conclusion of the ceremony.

If a corpse could be galvanised and set up in priest's robes to bless a loving couple whom Heaven has joined together, its benediction could scarcely be more passionless and mechanical than was that which Florian de St. Croix—the Brother Ambrose who had been the bride's confessor, the Beaudésir who had been the bridegroom's lieutenant—now pronounced over George Hamilton and Cerise de Montmirail. Not an eyelash quivered, not a muscle trembled, not a tone of emotion could be detected in his voice. Still young, still enthusiastic, still, though it was wild and warped and wilful, possessing a human heart, he believed honestly that he then bade farewell at once and for ever to earth and earthly things.

When they left the chapel, he was gone; gone back, so said some negroes lounging in the neighbourhood, to the other Jesuits at Maria Galante. They believed him to be a priest of that order, resident at their plantation, who had simply come across the island, and returned in the regular performance of his duty. They cheered him when he emerged from a side door and departed swiftly through their ranks. They cheered the bridal party a few minutes later

leaving the chapel to re-embark. They even cheered the marquise, when, after bidding them farewell, she separated from the others, and sought a house in the town, where Célandine had already collected several faithful slaves who could be trusted to defend her, and in the cellars of which refuge the Italian overseer was even then concealed. They cheered Slap-Jack more than anyone, turning round to curse them, not without blows, for crowding in too close. Light-hearted and impressionable, they were delighted with the glitter, the bustle, the parade of the whole business, and thought it little inferior to the "bobbery" of the preceding night.

So Cerise and her husband embarked on board the brigantine without delay. In less than an hour the anchor was up, and with a following tide and a wind off-shore, the *Bashful Maid* stood out to sea, carrying at least two happy hearts along with her, whatever she may have left behind. Before sunset she was hull-down on the horizon, but long after her white sails vanished their last gleam seemed yet to linger on the eyes of two sad, wistful watchers, for whom, henceforth, it was to be a gloomier world. They knew not each other's faces, they never guessed each other's feelings, nor imagined how close a link between the two existed in that sunny speck, fading to leeward on the deep blue sea. None the less longingly did they gaze eastward; none the less keenly did the Marquise de Montmirail and Florian de St. Croix feel that their loves, their hopes, their better selves —all that brightened the future, that enhanced the past, that made life endurable—was gone from them in the Homeward Bound.

CHAPTER XLI

LADY HAMILTON

THE daisies we string in chains before ten, we tread under foot without compunction after twenty. Cerise, pacing a noble terrace rolled and levelled beneath the windows of her husband's home, gave no thought to the humble petals bending to her light footfall, and rising again when it passed on; gave no thought to the flaring hollyhocks, the crimson roses, all the bright array of autumn's gaudier flowers flaunting about her in the imposing splendour of maturity; gave no thought even to the fair expanse of moor and meadow, dale and dingle, copse and corn-field, wood, wold, and water, on which her eyes were bent.

She might have travelled many a mile, too, even through beautiful England, without beholding such a scene. Overhead, the sky, clear and pure in the late summer, or the early autumn, seemed but of a deeper blue, because flecked here and there with wind-swept streaks of misty white. Around her glowed, in Nature's gaudiest patchwork, all the garden beauty that had survived July. On a lower level by a few inches lay a smooth, trim bowling-green, dotted with its unfinished game; and downward still, foot by foot, like a wide green staircase, row after row of terraces were banked, and squared, and spread between their close-cut black yew hedges, till they descended to the ivy-grown wall that divided pleasure-ground from park. Here, slopes of tufted grass, swelling into bolder outlines as they receded, rolled, like the volume of a freshening sea, into knolls, and dips, and ridges, feathered in waving fern—dotted with goodly oaks—traversed by deep, narrow glades, in which the deer were feeding—shy,

wild, and undisturbed. Beyond this, again, the variegated plain, rich in orchards, hedgerows, and enclosures studded with shocks of corn, seamed too by the silver of more than one glistening stream, was girdled by a belt of purple moorland; while, in the far distance, the horizon was shut in by a long low range of hills, lost in a grey-blue vapour, where they melted into sky.

Behind her stood the grim and weatherworn mansion, with its thick stone walls, dented, battered, and defaced, as if it had defied a thousand tempests and more than one siege, which, indeed, was the fact. Every old woman in the country-side could tell how the square grey keep, at the end of the south wing, had resisted the Douglas, and there was no mistaking Cromwell's handwriting on more than one rent in the comparatively modern portions of the building. Hamilton Hill, though it had never been called a fort, a castle, or even a hall, was known far and wide for a stronghold, that, well supplied and garrisoned, might keep fifty miles of the surrounding district in check; and the husband of Cerise was now lord of Hamilton Hill.

No longer the soldier adventurer, the leader of Grey Musketeers, compound of courtier and bravo—no longer the doubtful skipper of a suspicious craft, half-trader, half-pirate —Sir George Hamilton, with position, property, tenants, and influence, found himself a very different person from the Captain George who used to relieve guard at the Palais Royal, and lay the *Bashful Maid* broadside on to a Spanish galleon deep in the water, with her colours down and her foresail aback, a rich prize and an easy prey. Ere the brigantine had dropped her anchor in the first English port she made, George received intelligence of his far-off kinsman's death, and his own succession to a noble inheritance. It came at an opportune moment, and he was disposed to make the most of it. Therefore it was that Cerise (now Lady Hamilton) looked from the lofty terrace over many a mile of fair English scenery, much of which belonged, like herself, to the man she loved.

They were fairly settled now, and had taken their established place — no lowly station — amongst their neighbours. Precedence had not, indeed, been yielded them without a struggle; for in that, as in the following century, detraction claimed a fair fling at all new-comers, and not what they were, but *who* they were, was the important question amongst a provincial aristocracy, who made up by minute inquiry for the limited sphere of their research. At first people whispered

that the husband was an adventurer and the wife an actress. Well, if not an actress, at least a dancing-girl, whom he had picked up in Spain, in Paris, in the West Indies, at Tangiers, Tripoli, or Japan! Lady Hamilton's beauty, her refined manners, her exquisite dresses, warranted the meanest opinion of her in the minds of her own sex; and although, when they could no longer conceal from themselves that she was a Montmirail of the real Montmirails, they were obliged to own she had at least the advantage of high birth, I doubt if they loved her any better than before. They pitied Sir George, they said, one and all—"He, if you like, was charming. He had been page to the Great King; he had been adored by the ladies of the French Court; he had killed a Prince of the Blood in a duel; he had sacked a convent of Spanish nuns, and wore the rosary of the Lady Abbess under his waistcoat; he had been dreadfully wicked, but he was so polite! he had the *bel air*; he had the *tourneur Louis Quatorze*; he had the manners of the princes, and the electors, and the archdukes now passing away. Such men would be *impossible* soon; and to think he could have been entrapped by that tawdry Frenchified miss, with her airs and graces, her fans and furbelows, and yards of the best Mechlin lace on the dress she went gardening in! It was nothing to *them*, of course, that the man should have committed such an absurdity; but, in common humanity, they could not help being sorry for it, and, unless they were very much deceived, so was he!"

With the squires, again, and county grandees of the male sex, including two or three baronets, a knight of the shire, and the lord-lieutenant himself, it was quite different. These honest gentlemen, whether fresh and fasting in the morning, or bemused with claret towards the afternoon, prostrated themselves before Cerise, and did homage to her charms. Her blue eyes, her rosy lips, the way her gloves fitted, the slender proportions of her feet, the influence of her soft, sweet manner, resulting from a kindly, innocent heart—above all, the foreign accent, which added yet another grace, childish, mirth-inspiring, and bewitching, to everything she said—caused men of all ages and opinions to place their necks voluntarily beneath the yoke. They swore by her; they toasted her; they broke glasses innumerable in her honour; they vowed, with repeated imprecations, nothing had ever been seen like her before; and they held out to her husband the right hand of fellowship, as much for her sake as for his own.

Sir George's popularity increased on acquaintance. A man who could fly a hawk with science—who could kill his game on the wing—who could ride any horse perfectly straight over any part of their country—who seemed to care very little for politics, except in so far as that the rights of *venerie* should be protected—who was reputed a consummate swordsman, and seen, on occasion, to empty his bottle of claret with exceeding goodwill—was not likely to remain long in the background amongst the hardy northern gentlemen with whom his lot was cast. Very soon Sir George Hamilton's society was sought as eagerly by both sexes, as his wife's beauty was admired by the one and envied—shall I say denied?—by the other.

Notwithstanding female criticism, which female instinct may possibly rate at its true value, Cerise found herself very happy. Certainly, the life she led was very different from that to which she had been accustomed in her youth. An English lady at that period devoted much of her time to duties that are now generally performed by a housekeeper, and Cerise had resolved to become a thorough English lady simply, I imagine, because she thought it would please George. So she rose early, inspected the dairies, betrayed contemptible ignorance in the manufacture of butter and cream, reviewed vast stores of linen, put her white arms through a coarse canvas apron, and splashed little dabs of jam upon her delicate nose, with the conviction that she was a perfectly competent and efficient housewife. Such occupations, if more healthy, were certainly less exciting than the ever-recurring gaieties of the family hotel in Paris, less agreeable than the luxurious tropical indolence of Montmirail West.

There were servants, plenty of them, at Hamilton Hill, who would literally have shed their blood in defence of their mistress, but they showed neither the blind obedience of the negro nor the shrewd readiness of the Parisian domestic. On the contrary, they seemed persuaded that length of service entitled them to be obstinate, perverse, and utterly negligent of orders. There were two or three seniors of whom Lady Hamilton positively stood in awe, and an old grey-headed butler, perfectly useless from gout and obesity, would expostulate angrily with his mistress for walking bareheaded on the terrace in an east wind. That same east wind, too, was another trial to Cerise. It gave her cold, it made her shiver, and she was almost afraid it sometimes made her cross. There were drawbacks, you see, even to a love-match, a fortune, and Hamilton Hill!

Yet she was very happy. She continually repeated to herself how happy she was. To be sure, she missed her mother's society, missed it far more than she expected when at first she acquired the freedom of the matron's guild. Perhaps, too, she may have missed the incense of flattery so delicately offered at the receptions of the marquise; nay, even the ponderous and well-turned compliments of the prince-marshal, who, to do him justice, treated her with a chivalrous affection, compounded of romantic devotion to her mother, and paternal regard for herself. But I am sure she would never have allowed that a drop could be wanting in the full cup of her happiness, for was not George the whole world to her, and had she not got him here all to herself?

She walked thoughtfully on the terrace, surrounded by the glorious beauty of earth and sky, looking, and seeing not. Perhaps she was back in Touraine amongst the vineyards, perhaps she was in the shady convent-garden, cooling her temples in the pure fresh breeze that whispered to the beeches how it had gathered perfumes from the orchards and the hedgerows and the scented meadows of pleasant Normandy. Perhaps she was rustling through a minuet in the same set with a daughter of France, or fanning mamma in the hot West Indian evening, or straining her eyes to windward from the deck of the *Bashful Maid*, with George's arm round her waist, and his telescope pointing to the distant sail, that seemed plain to every eye on board but hers. At any-rate, she appeared to be leagues off in mind, though her dainty feet, with slow, measured steps, were pacing to and fro on the terrace at Hamilton Hill. All at once her colour came, her eyes sparkled, she brightened up like one who wakes from sleep, for her heart still leaped to the tramp of boot and jingle of spur, as it had leaped in the days gone by, when a certain musketeer would visit his guard at unseasonable hours, that he might have an excuse for passing under her window. She ran across the terrace to meet him, with a little exclamation of delight.

"How long you have been, George!" she said, smiling up in his face; "why did you not ride faster? It is so dull here without you."

She had him by the arm, and clasped her pretty white hands across his sleeve, leaning her weight on his wrist. He looked affectionately down in the fair young face, but he had come at a gallop for five or six miles across the moor, as the state of his boots no less than his flushed face

indicated, and he did not feel inclined to admit he had been dilatory, so his answer was less that of the lover than the husband.

"Dull, Cerise! I am sorry you find this place so dull, seeing that you and I must spend the greater part of our lives here. I thought you liked England, and a country life!"

Why is a man flattered by those exactions in a mistress that gall him so in a wife? Perhaps it is because a generous nature concedes willingly the favour, but is stern to resist the claim. When his mistress says she cannot do without him, all the protective instincts, so strong in masculine affection, rise in her behalf, but the same sentiment expressed by one who assumes a right to his time and attention, rather awakes a sense of apprehension, and a spirit of revolt. Where woman only sees the single instance, man establishes the broad principle. If he yields on this occasion, he fears his time will never again be his own, and such misgivings show no little ignorance of the nature with which he has to deal, a nature to be guided rather than taught, persuaded rather than convinced, sometimes advised, but never confuted, and on which close reasoning is but labour thrown away. I think that woman wise who is careful never to weary her husband. The little god thrives well on smiles, and is seldom stronger than when in tears. While he frowns and sets his teeth, he is capable of a lion's efforts and a mule's endurance, but when he begins to yawn, he is but like other children, and soon falls fast asleep.

Cerise hated George to speak to her in that grave tone. It grated on the poor girl's nerves, and frightened her besides, which was indeed unreasonable, for he had never said a harsh word to her in his life. She looked timidly in his face, and answered meekly enough—

"Every place is dull to me, George, without you. I wish I could be always with you—to help you with the tenants, to dine with you at the court-house, to sit behind you on Emerald when you go for a gallop across the moor. Why could I not ride with you this morning?"

He laughed good-humouredly, and stroked the hands clasped on his wrist.

"It would have been the very thing, Cerise!" said he. "I think I see you assisting at a cock-fight, placing the fowls, picking them up, and counting them out! I think I can see Sir Marmaduke's face when you walked into the pit. I think I can hear the charitable remarks of all our county ladies,

who are not disposed to let you off more easily, my dear, because you are so much better-looking and better dressed than anything they ever saw north of the Trent. Yes, my darling, come to the next cock-fight by all means. *Il ne manquerait que ça!*"

The little French sentence was music to her ears. It was the language in which he had wooed her; and though she spoke *his* language now assiduously, and spoke it well, the other was her mother-tongue. She laughed too.

"Perhaps I shall take you at your word," said she, "though it is a cruel, horrid, wicked amusement. Did you win, George?"

"Fifty gold pieces!" was his answer; "and the same on a return match next week, which I am equally sure of. They will get you two new dresses from Paris."

"I want no dresses from Paris," said she, drawing him towards the bowling-green. "I want you to help me in my garden. Come and look at my Provence roses."

But Sir George had no time to spare even for so tempting a pursuit. A fresh horse was even now waiting to carry him ten miles off to a training of the militia, in which constitutional force, as became his station, he took a proper interest. He was the country gentleman now from head to heel, and frequented all gatherings and demonstrations in which country gentlemen take delight. Of these, a cock-fight was not the most refined, but it was the fashion of his time and his class, so we must not judge him more severely than did Cerise, who, truth to tell, thought he could not possibly do wrong, and would have given him absolution for a worse crime, in consideration of his accompanying her to the garden to look at her Provence roses.

"To-morrow," said he; husbandlike, missing the chance of a compliment about the roses, which a lover would not have let slip. A lover, indeed, if obliged to depart, would probably have ridden away with one of the flowers in his bosom. "To-morrow, Cerise. I have a press of business to-day, but will get back in time for dinner." And touching her forehead lightly with his lips, Sir George was gone before she could stop him, and in another minute his horse's hoofs were clattering out of the stable-yard.

From the terrace where she stood, Cerise watched his receding figure as he galloped merrily down the park, knee-deep in fern, threading the old oaks, and sending the deer scampering on all sides across the open; watched him with a cloud upon her young face, and a quiver about her mouth,

that was near akin to tears; watched long after he was out of sight, and then turned wearily away with a languid step and a deep-drawn sigh.

She was but going through the ordeal that sooner or later must be endured by every young wife who dearly loves her husband. She was but learning the unavoidable lesson that marriage is not courtship, that reality is not illusion, that the consistent tenderness of a husband, if more practical, is less flattering than the romantic adoration of a lover. She was beginning to shape into suspicion certain vague misgivings which had lately haunted her, that although George was all the world to *her*, she was only part of the world to George! It is from the sweetest dreams that we are most unwilling to awake, and therefore it is no wonder that Lady Hamilton's preoccupation prevented her observing a strange horseman riding up the avenue, slowly and laboriously, as though after a long journey, of which the final destination seemed to be Hamilton Hill.

CHAPTER XLII

THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH—

IN the year 1540, five Spaniards and a Savoyard, styling themselves Clerks of the Company of Jesus, left Paris under the leadership of the famous Ignatius Loyola, to found an establishment at Rome. Here Pope Paul III. presented them with a church, and in return these half-dozen of energetic priests gave in an unqualified adhesion to the Sovereign Pontiff. Their avowed intention in thus forming themselves into a separate and independent body (except in so far as they owed allegiance to its supreme head), was the propagation of the Roman Catholic faith, the conversion of heathens, the suppression of heresy, and the education of the young. For these purposes a system was at once organised which should combine the widest sphere of action with the closest surveillance over its agents, the broadest views with the most minute attention to details, an absolute unquestioned authority with a staunch and implicit obedience. To attain universal rule (possibly for a good motive, but at any sacrifice to attain it) over the opinions of humanity, however different in age, sex, character, and nationalities, was the object proposed; and almost the first maxim laid down, and never departed from in the Order, established that all means were justifiable to such an end. It was obvious that to win universal dominion over the moral as over the physical world, every effort must not only be vigorous, but combined and simultaneous, such waste of power must never be contemplated as the possibility of two forces acting in opposite directions, and therefore a code of discipline must be established, minute, stringent, and comprehensive, like that of an army before an enemy, but with this difference, that its penalties must never be modified by circumstances, nor its bonds relaxed by conquest or defeat. In the Order of Jesus must be no speaking, no questioning, no individuality, and—no forgiveness!

Their constitution was as follows: A General, as he was styled, resided in perpetuity at Rome, and from that central

spot sent forth his directions over the whole civilised world, enjoying absolute authority and exacting unqualified obedience. Even to the supreme head, however, was attached an officer entitled his Admonisher. It was his duty to observe the conduct of his chief, and report on it to the five Assistants, who constituted that chief's council. These, again, were instructed to watch each other carefully, and thus, not even at the very head and fountain of supreme authority could any single individual consider himself a free agent, even in the most trifling matters of dress, deportment, or daily conversation.

In every country where the Jesuits obtained a footing (and, while there are few in which they have not been notoriously powerful, even in those which betray no traces of their presence, who shall say that their influence has not been at work below the surface?) a Provincial, as he was called, assumed the direction of affairs within a certain district, and on his administration every one of his subordinates, temporal and spiritual, was instructed to report. There were three degrees in the Order, according to the experience and utility of its votaries—these were Professors, Coadjutors, both priests and laymen, for their ramifications extended from the highest to the lowest, through all classes of society, and Novices. To enter the Order, many severe examinations had to be passed, and while it numbered among its votaries men of superlative abilities in a thousand different callings, every member was employed according to his capacity of useful service.

With such an organisation it may be imagined that the society has been a powerful engine for good and for evil. It has planted Christianity in the most remote corners of the earth, and has sent missionaries of skill, eloquence, piety, and dauntless courage, amongst savages who otherwise might never have heard the faintest echo of the glad tidings, in which all men claim interest alike; but, on the other hand, it has done incalculable mischief in the households of Christian Europe, has wormed itself into the confidence of women, has destroyed the concord of families, has afforded the assailants of religion innumerable weapons of offence, and in its dealings with those whom it was especially bound to succour and protect, has brought on them desolation rather than comfort, remorse where there should be hope, and war instead of peace.

It is necessary to remember the effect of a constant and reciprocal supervision, not only on the outward actions and conduct, but on the very thoughts and characters of men

unavoidably fettered by its influence, to understand the position of two priests walking side by side along one of the narrow level banks that intersect the marshy country lying near the town of St. Omer.

These old friends, if, indeed, under such conditions as theirs men can ever be termed friends, had not met since they sat together, many years before, beneath the limes at Versailles, when the younger had not yet taken orders, and the elder, although he accepted the title of abbé, neither led the life of an ecclesiastic, nor admitted openly that he was in any way amenable to the discipline observed by the Jesuits. Now, both were ostensibly votaries of the Order. Its impress might be seen in their measured steps, their thoughtful faces, and their downward looks, taking no heed of the peaceful scene around: the level marshes, the ripening orchards, the lazy cattle knee-deep in rich wet herbage, the peasant's punt pushed drowsily and sluggishly along the glistening ditches that divided his fields, the mellow warmth of the autumnal sun, and the swarms of insects wheeling in his slanting, reddening rays. They saw, or at least they heeded, none of this—deep in conversation, their subject seemed of engrossing interest; yet each looked only by stealth in the other's face, withdrawing his glance and bending it on the path at his feet the instant it met his friend's. At times neither spoke for several paces, and it was during such periods of silence that the expression of habitual mistrust and constraint became painfully apparent. In the elder man it was softened and smoothed over, partly by effort, partly by the acquired polish of society, but the younger seemed to chafe with repressed ardour, like a rash horse, impatient but generous, fretting under the unaccustomed curb.

After a longer pause than usual, this one spoke with more energy than he had yet displayed.

"I only wish to do *right*. What is it to me, Malletort, that the world should misjudge me, or that I should sink in the esteem of those whose good opinion I value? I only wish to do right, I say, always in compliance with the orders of my superiors."

The other smiled.

"In the first place," said he, "you must not call me Malletort, at least not within so short a distance of those college chimneys; but we will let that pass; for though a novice, still you are worthy of speedy promotion, and it is only for novices in the first period of probation that our rules are so exacting. You wish to do right. So be it. You

have done very wrong hitherto, or you might have been a provincial by this time. Well, my son, confession is the first step to amendment, and then"—

He paused, and bit his lip. It was difficult to keep down the old sarcastic smile, but he did it, and looked gravely in the other's face.

"Penance!" replied the younger. "I know it too well. Ah! *mea culpa! mea culpa!* I have been a great sinner. I have repented in sackcloth and ashes. I have confessed freely. I wish—yes, I repeat, I *wish* to atone humbly—and yet, oh! for mercy's sake, tell me, is there no way but this?"

His agony of mind was too apparent on his face. Even Malletort felt a momentary compunction when he remembered the hopeful enthusiastic youth who had sat with him under the limes at Versailles all those years ago; when he remembered the desperate career on which he had embarked, his insubordination, his apostasy, and those paroxysms of remorse that drove him back into the bosom of the Church. Could this depressed and miserable penitent be the once bright and happy Florian de St. Croix? and had he been brought to this pass simply because he possessed such inconvenient superfluities as a heart and a conscience? Malletort, I say, felt a twinge of compunction, but of pity very little,—of indecision, not one bit.

"Would you go to a doctor," said he gravely, "and teach him how to cure you of a deadly malady? Would you choose your own medicine, my son, and refuse the only healing draught prescribed, because it was bitter to the taste? There is but one way of retracing your steps. You must go back along the very path that led you into evil. That the effort will be trying, I admit. All uphill work is trying to the utmost, but how else can men attain the summit? That the task is painful I allow, but were it pleasant, where would be the penance? Besides, you know our rules, my son, the time is not far off when I shall be permitted to say, my brother. We have got you. Will you dare to hesitate ere you obey?"

An expression of intense fear came over Florian's face, but it seemed less the physical fear of danger from without than an absorbing dread of the moral enemy within.

"I *must* obey," he answered, in a low voice, shuddering while he spoke. "I must obey, I know, readily, willingly. Alas! Malletort, there is my unforgiven sin, my mortal peril. Too willingly do I undertake the task. It is my dearest wish to find myself addressed to it—that is why I entreat not to

be sent—that is why I implore them to spare me. It is my soul that is in danger. Heart, hope, happiness, home, liberty, identity, are all gone from me, and now I shall lose my soul."

"Your soul!" repeated the other, again repressing a sneer. "Do not distress yourself, my son, about your soul. It is in very safe keeping, and your superiors are, doubtless, the best judges of its value and eventual destination. In the meantime, do not give way to a far-fetched casuistry, or a morbid delicacy of sentiment. If your heart is in your task, and you go to it willingly, it will be the more easily and the more effectually accomplished. Congratulate yourself, therefore, that your penance is not distasteful as well as dangerous, a torture of bodily weakness, rather than a trial of spiritual strength. Remember, there is no sin of action where there is none of intention. There can be none of intention where a deed is done simply in compliance with the superior's will. If that deed be pleasurable, it is but so much gained on the chances of the service. Enjoy it as you would enjoy the sun's rays if you were standing sentry on a winter's day at the Louvre. It is not for you, a simple soldier of the Order, to speculate on your own merits or your own failures, those above you will take care that neither are overlooked. Eat your rations and be thankful. Your duty, first and last, is but to obey!"

It will be seen by these phrases, so carefully worded according to the rules of the Order, yet bearing the while a covert sarcasm for his own private gratification, that the real character of Malletort was but little changed, since he intrigued at the council table or drank at the suppers of the Regent. He was a Jesuit priest now in garb and outward semblance; he was still the clever, unscrupulous, unbelieving, pleasure-loving abbé at the core. So necessary had he become to the Regent as the confidant of his secret schemes, whether their object were the acquisition of a province or the dismissal of a mistress, that he would have found little difficulty in making his peace with his prince, even after the untoward failure of the Montmirail Gardens, had he chosen to do so. The Regent, maddened with disappointment, and especially sore because of the ridicule created by the whole business, turned at first fiercely enough on his trusty adviser, but found, to his surprise, that the abbé was beforehand with him. Malletort assumed an air of high-minded indignation, talked of the honour of an ancient house, of the respect due, at least in outward courtesy, to a kinswoman of his own, hinted at his fidelity and his services, protested against the

ingratitude with which they had been requited, and ended by tendering his resignation, with a request for leave to absent himself from Paris. The result, as usual with the Duke of Orleans, was a compromise. His outraged servant should quit him for a time, but would remain at least faithful in heart to the master who now entreated his pardon. In a few weeks the matter, he thought, would be forgotten, and for those few weeks he must manage his own affairs without the abbé's assistance.

Malletort had several good reasons for thus detaching himself from the Court. The first, and most important, was the state of the duke's health. The abbé had not failed to mark the evil effects produced even by so slight an excitement as the affair at the Hôtel Montmirail. He perceived the Regent's tendency to apoplexy growing stronger day by day; he observed that the slightest emotion now caused him to flush a dark red even in the morning, and he knew that at supper his fulness of habit was so obvious as to alarm the very roués, lest every draught should be his last. If sudden death were to carry off the Regent, Malletort felt all his labour would have been thrown away, and he must begin at the lowest round of the ladder again. His connection with the Jesuits, for he had long ago enlisted himself as a secret member of that powerful Order, was now of service to him. They had influence with the advisers of the young king, they were ardent promoters of the claims to the British crown, laid by that James Stuart whom history has called the Old Pretender. It was quite possible that under a new state of things they might hold some of the richest rewards in France and England to bestow on their adherents. Above all, the very keystone of their system, the power that set all their machinery in motion, was a spirit of busy and unremitting intrigue. Abbé Malletort never breathed so freely as in an atmosphere of plots and counterplots. With all the energy of his nature, he devoted himself to the interests of the Order, keeping up his connection with the Court, chiefly on its behalf. He was as ready now to betray the Regent to his new allies, as he had been a few months before to sacrifice honour and probity for the acquisition of that prince's goodwill.

There are few men, however, who can thoroughly divest themselves of all personal feelings in the pursuit of their own interest. Even Malletort possessed the weaknesses of pride, pique, and certain injudicious partialities which he could not quite overcome. He hated his late patron for many reasons of his own, for none more than that his persecution had

compelled Madame de Montmirail and her daughter to leave France and seek a refuge beyond the sea. If he cared for anything on earth, besides his own aggrandisement, it was his kinswoman; and when he thought of the marquise, a smile would overspread his features that denoted anything but Christian charity or goodwill to her royal admirer.

He spent much of his time at St. Omer now, where several provincials and other influential members of the Order were assembled, organising a movement in favour of the so-called James III.; these were in constant correspondence with the English Jacobites, and according to their established principle, were enlisting every auxiliary, legitimate or otherwise, for the furtherance of their schemes. They possessed lists of surprising accuracy, in which were noted down the names, resources, habits, and political tendencies of many private gentlemen in remote countries, who little dreamed they were of such importance. An honest squire, whose ideas scarcely soared beyond his harriers, his claret, and his fat cattle, would have been surprised to learn that his character, his income, his pursuits, his domestic affections, and his habitual vices were daily canvassed by a society of priests, numbering amongst them the keenest intellects in Europe, who had travelled many hundred leagues expressly to meet in a quiet town in Artois, of which he had never heard the name, and give their opinions on himself. Perhaps his insular love of isolation would have been disgusted, and he might have been less ready to peril life and fortune, had he known the truth.

But every landholder of importance was the object of considerable discussion. It was Abbé Malletort's familiarity with previous occurrences, and the characters of all concerned, that led him now to put the pressure on the renegade who had lost his rank with his desertion, and returned in the lowest grade as a novice, to make his peace with the Order.

"My friend," resumed the abbé, after another long silence, during which the sun had reached the horizon, and was now shedding a broad red glare on his companion's face, giving him an excuse to shade it with his hand, "your penance has been well begun, and needs but this one culminating effort to be fully accomplished. I have been at Rome very lately, and the General himself spoke approvingly of your repentance and your return. The provincial at Maria Galante had reported favourably on your conduct during the disturbances in the island, and your unfeigned penitence, when you gave yourself up as a deserter from the Order. We have no

secrets, you know, amongst ourselves; or rather, I should say nothing is so secret but that it has its witnesses. Here, at Paris, in Rome, will be known all that you do in England; more, all that you leave undone. I need scarcely charge you to be diligent, trustworthy, secret; but I must warn you not to be over-scrupulous. Remember, the intention justifies the deed. It is not only expedient, but meritorious to do evil that good may come."

They were now approaching the town, and the sentry was being relieved at its fortified gate. The clash of arms, the measured tramp, the martial bearing of the soldiers, called up in Florian's mind such associations as for the moment drowned the sentiments of religious penitence and self-accusation that had lately taken possession of his heart. He longed to throw off the priest's robe, the grave deportment, the hateful trammels of an enforced and professional hypocrisy, and to feel a man once more—a man, adventurous, free, desperate, relying for very life on the plank beneath his foot or the steel in his hand, but at least able to carry his head high amongst his fellows, and to know that were it but for five minutes, the future was his own. It was sin even to dream of such things.

"*Mea culpa! mea culpa!*" he muttered in a desponding tone, and beat his breast, and bent his eyes once more upon the ground. "When am I to go?" said he meekly, reverting to their previous conversation, and abandoning, as though after deep reflection, the unwillingness he had shown from the first.

"This evening, after vespers," answered the abbé, with a scarce perceptible inflection of contempt in his voice that denoted he had read him through like a book. "You will attend as usual. Everything is prepared, even to a garb less grave than that you wear, and a good horse (ah! you cannot help smiling now) will be waiting for you at the little gate. You ought to be half-way to Calais before the moon is up."

His face brightened now, though he strove hard to conceal his satisfaction. Here was change, freedom, excitement, liberty, at least for a time, and an adventurous journey, to terminate in *her* presence, who was still to his eyes the ideal of womankind. All, too, in the fulfilment of a penance, the execution of a duty. His heart leaped beneath his cassock, and warned him of the danger he incurred. Danger, indeed! It did but add to the intoxication of the draught. With difficulty he restrained the bounding impatience of his step, and kept his face averted from his friend. The precaution was useless. Malletort knew his thoughts as well as if he

had been his penitent in the confessional, and laughed within himself. The tool at least was sharp and ready, quivering, highly-tempered, and flexible; it needed but a steady hand to drive it home.

"You will come to the provincial for final instructions half an hour before you mount," said he gravely, and added, without altering his tone or moving a muscle of his countenance, "Your especial duty is to gain over Sir George. For this object it is essential to obtain the goodwill of Lady Hamilton."

CHAPTER XLIII

—FOR THE STAR

HE ought to have known, he *did* know, his danger. If he was not sure of it during his ride to the coast, while he crossed the Channel, and felt the wild spray dash against his face like the greeting of an old friend, nor in the long journey that took him northward through many a smiling valley and breezy upland of that country which he had once thought so gloomy and desolate, which seemed so fair and sunny now, because it was *hers*, he ought to have realised it when he rode under the old oaks at Hamilton Hill, and dreaded, even more than he longed, to see her white dress glancing among their stems. Above all, he ought to have been warned, when, entering the house, though Lady Hamilton herself did not appear, he felt surrounded by her presence, and experienced that sensation of repose which, after all his tumult of anxiety and uncertainty, pervades a man's whole being in the home of the woman he loves. There were her gardening gloves, and plain straw hat, perhaps yet warm from her touch, lying near the door. There were flowers that surely must have been gathered by her hands but a few hours ago, on the table where he laid his pistols and riding-wand. There was her work set aside on a chair, her shawl thrown over its back, the footstool she had used pushed half across the floor, and an Iceland hawk, with hood, bell, and jesses, moving restlessly on the perch, doubtless in expectation of its mistress's return.

He tried hard to deceive himself, and he succeeded. He felt that in all his lawless infatuation for this pure, spotless woman, he had never loved her so well as now—now, that she was his friend's wife! But he argued, he pleaded, he convinced himself in his madness, that such a love as his, even a husband must approve. It was an affection, he repeated, or rather a worship, completely spiritualised and self-sacrificing, to outlast the material trammels of this life, and follow her, still faithful, still changeless, into eternity.

So true, so holy, however hopeless, however foolish, could such a love as this deprived of all earthly leaven, be criminal, even in him—the priest, for her—the wedded wife? No, no, he told himself, a thousand times, no! And all the while the man within the man, who sits, and mocks, and judges, and condemns us all, said Yes—a thousand times—Yes!

There is but one end to such debate, when the idol is under the same roof with the worshipper. He put the question from him for the present, and only resolved that, at least, he might love all belonging to her, for her sake. All, even to the very flowers she gathered, and the floor she trod. He took up the work she had set aside, and pressed it passionately to his lips, his heart, his eyes. The door opened, and he dropped it, scared, startled, guilty, like a man detected in a crime. It was a disappointment, yet he felt it a relief, to find that the intruder was not Cerise. He had scarcely yet learned to call her Lady Hamilton. There was no disappointment, however, in the new-comer's face, as he stood for a moment with the door in his hand, looking at Florian with a quaint comical smile, in which respect for Sir George's guest was strangely mingled with a sailor's hearty welcome to his shipmate. The latter sentiment soon predominated, and Slap-Jack, hurrying forward with a scrape of his foot and a profusion of sea-bows, seized the visitor by both hands, called him "my hearty!" several times over; and, finally, relapsing with considerable effort into the staid and confidential servant of the family, offered him, in his master's absence, liquid refreshment on the spot.

"It's a fair wind, whichever way it blowed, as brought *you* here," exclaimed the late foretop-man, when the energy of his greeting had somewhat subsided; "and so the skipper, I mean Sir George, will swear, when he knows his first lieutenant's turned up in this here anchorage, and my lady too, askin' your reverence's pardon once more, being that I'm not quite so sure as I ought to be of your honour's rating."

Slap-Jack was becoming a little confused, remembering the part played by Beaudésir on the last occasion of their meeting.

"Sir George does not expect me," answered Florian, returning the seaman's greeting with cordial warmth; "but unless he is very much altered, I think his welcome will be no less hearty than your own."

"That I'll swear it will—that I'll swear he doesn't," protested Slap-Jack, taking upon himself the character of confidential domestic more and more. "Sir George never

ordered so much as a third place to be laid at dinner; but we'll make that all ship-shape with a round turn in no time; an' if you don't drink 'Sweethearts and Wives' to-day in a flagon of the best, why, say I'm a Dutchman! When I see them towing your nag into harbour, and our old purser's steward, butler, as we calls him ashore, he hails me and sings out as there's a visitor between decks, I knowed as something out of the common was aboard. I can't tell you for why; but I knowed it as sure as the compass. I haven't been so pleased since I was paid off. If it wasn't that my lady's in the room above this, and it's not discipline to disturb her, blowed if I wouldn't give three such cheers as should shake the acorns down at the far end of the west avenue. But I'll do it to-night after quarters, see if I won't, Lieutenant Bo—— askin' your pardon, your honour's reverence."

Thus conversing, and occupying himself the whole time with the guest's comforts, for Slap-Jack, sailor-like, had not forgotten to be two-handed, he showed Florian into a handsome bedchamber, and unpacked with ready skill the traveller's valise, taken off his horse's croup, that contained the modest wardrobe, which in those days of equestrian journeys was considered sufficient for a gentleman's requirements. He then assured him that Sir George's arrival could not be long delayed, as dinner would be served in half an hour, and the waiting-woman had already gone upstairs to dress her ladyship; also, that there was a sirloin of beef on the spit and ale in the cellar brewed thirty-five years ago next October; with which pertinent information he left the visitor to his toilet and his reflections.

The first was soon concluded; but the other lasted him through his labours, and accompanied him downstairs to the great hall, where Slap-Jack had told him he would find dinner prepared. His host and hostess were already there. Of Lady Hamilton's greeting he was unconscious, for his head swam, and he dared not lift his eyes to her face; but Sir George's welcome was hearty, even boisterous. Florian could not help thinking that, had he been in the hospitable baronet's place, he would have been less delighted with the arrival of a visitor.

Whatever people's feelings may be, however, they go to dinner all the same. Slap-Jack, an old grey-headed butler, and two or three livery servants stood in attendance. The dishes were uncovered, and Florian found himself seated at a round table in the centre of the fine old hall like a man in a dream, confused indeed and vaguely bewildered, yet conscious

of no surprise at the novelty of his situation, and taking in all its accessories with a glance. He was aware of the stag's skeleton frontlet, crowned by its gigantic antlers, beetling, bleached, and grim, over the door; of the oak panelling and stained glass, the high carved chimneypiece, with its grotesque supporters, the vast logs smouldering in embers on the hearth, the dressed deer-skins, that served for rug or carpet wherever a covering seemed needed on the polished floor; nay, even of a full-length picture by Vandyck, representing the celebrated Count Anthony Hamilton, looking his very politest, in a complete suit of plate-armour, with a yard or two of cambric round his neck, and an enormous wig piling its hyacinthine curls above his forehead, to descend in coarse cascades of hair below his waist. All this had Florian taken note of before he could conscientiously declare that he had looked his hostess in the face. It made him start to hear the sweet voice once more, frank, cordial, and caressing as of old. One of the many charms which Cerise exercised over her fellow-creatures was the gentle, kindly tone in which she spoke to all.

"You have just come from France, you say, Father Ambrose. Pardon, Monsieur de St. Croix. How am I to address you? From our dear France, George. Only think. He has scarcely left it a week."

"Where they did not give you such ale as that, I'll be bound," answered Sir George, motioning Slap-Jack to fill for the guest, a hospitable rite performed by the old privateer's-man with extreme goodwill, and a solemn wink of approval, as he placed the beaker at his hand. "What! You have not learned to drink our *vin ordinaire* yet? And now, I remember, you were always averse to heavy potations. Here, fill him a bumper of claret, some of you! Taste that, my friend. I don't think we ever drank better in the musketeers. Welcome to Hamilton Hill, old comrade. My lady will drink to your health too, before she hears the latest Paris news. She has not forgotten her country; and as for me, why, you know our old principle—*Mousquetaire avant tout!*"

Sir George emptied his glass, and Cerise, bowing courteously, touched hers with her lips. Florian found himself at once, so to speak, *enfant de la maison*, and recovered his presence of mind accordingly. He addressed himself, however, chiefly to his host.

"You forget," said he, "that I have been living in the seclusion of a cloister. Though I have carried a sword and kept my watches under your command, and spent almost the

happiest days of my life in your company, I was a priest before I was a musketeer, and a priest I must always remain. Nevertheless, even at St. Omer, we are not utterly severed from the world and its vanities; and though we do not participate in them, we hear them freely canvassed. The first news, of course, for madame (pardon! I must learn to call you by your English name—for Lady Hamilton), regards the despotism of King Chiffon. The farthingale is worn more oval; diamond buckles are gone out; it is bad taste just now to carry a fan anywhere except to church."

In spite of his agitation he adopted a light tone of jest befitting the subject—for was he not a Jesuit?—and stole a look at Cerise while he spoke. Many a time had he dreamt of a lovely girl blooming into womanhood, in the Convent of our Lady of Succour. Ever since the tumult of her hasty wedding, after the escape from Cash-a-Crou, he had been haunted by a pale, sweet, agitated face, on which he had invoked a blessing at the altar from the depths of his tortured heart; but what did he think of her now? She had reached that queenly standard to which women only attain after marriage; and while she had lost none of her early charms, her frankness, her simplicity, her radiant smile, her deep truthful eyes, she had added to them that gentle dignity, that calm, assured repose of manner, which completes the graces of mature womanhood, and adorns the wedded wife as fitly as her purple robe becomes a queen. She could look him in the face quietly and steadily enough; but while his very heart thrilled at her voice, his eyes fell, as though dazzled, beneath her beauty.

"You forget, monsieur," said she, with an affectionate glance at her husband, "I am an Englishwoman now; and we have deeper interests here even than the change of fashions and the revolutions in the kingdom of dress. Besides, mamma keeps me informed on all such subjects, as well as those of more importance; but she is in Touraine now, and I am quite in the dark as regards everything at Paris; above all, the political state of the Court. You see we are no longer musketeers."

She smiled playfully at George, in allusion to the sentiment he had lately broached, and looked, Florian thought, lovelier than ever. The excitement of conversation had brought a colour to her cheek. Now, when she ceased, it faded away, leaving her perhaps none the less beautiful, that she was a little pale and seemed tired. He observed the change of course. Not an inflection of her voice, not a quiver

of an eyelash, not one of those silken hairs out of place on her soft forehead, could have escaped his notice. "Was she unhappy?" he thought; "was she, too, dissatisfied with her lot? Had she failed to reach that resting-place of the heart which is sought for eagerly by so many, and found but by so few?" It pained him; yes, he was glad to feel that it pained him to think this possible. Yet would he have been better pleased to learn that her languor of manner, her pale weariness of brow, were only the effects of her morning's disappointment, when she waited in vain for the company of her husband? But such an under-current of reflection in no way affected the tide of his conversation; nor had he forgotten the primary cause of his journey—the especial object for which he was now sitting at Sir George Hamilton's table.

"I cannot pretend," said he, "to be so well informed on political matters as madame la marquise. I can only tell you the news of all the world—the gossip that people talk in the streets. The Regent is unpopular, and grows more so day by day. His excesses have at last disgusted the good *bourgeoisie* of the capital; and these honest citizens, who think only of selling spices over a counter, will, as you know, endure a good deal before they venture to complain of a prince who throws money about with both hands. As the young king grows older, they are more encouraged to cry out; and in Paris, as in Persia, they tell me, it is now the fashion to worship the rising sun. Of course France will follow suit; but we are quiet people at St. Omer; and I do not think our peasantry in Artois have yet realised the death of Louis Quatorze. When Jean Baptiste is thoroughly satisfied on that point, he will, of course, throw up his red cap, and shout 'Vive Louis Quinze!' Till then the Regency assumes all the indistinct terrors of the Unknown. Seriously, I believe the duke's day is over, and that the way to Court favour lies through Villeroy's orderly-room into the apartment of the young king!"

"And the musketeers?" asked Sir George eagerly. "That must be all in their favour. They have stood so firm by the marshal and the *real* throne, their privileges will now surely be respected and increased."

"On the contrary," replied Florian, "the musketeers are in disgrace. The Grey Company was actually warned to leave Paris for Marly, although neither the king nor the Regent was to be there in person. At the last moment the order was revoked, or there must have been a mutiny. As it was, they refused to parade on the duke's birthday, and were only

brought to reason by Bras-de-Fer, who made them a speech as long as that interminable sword he wears at his belt.

"Which was not long enough to reach my ribs, however," interrupted Sir George heartily, "with the Cadet Eugène Beaudésir at my side to parry it. Oh! that such a fencer should be thrown away on the Church! Well, fill your glass, Sir Priest, and never blush about it. Cerise here knows the whole story, and has only failed to thank you because she has not yet had the opportunity."

"But I do now," interposed Lady Hamilton, bending on him her blue eyes with the pure tenderness of an angel. "I thank you for it with my whole heart."

He felt at that moment how less than trifling had been his service compared with his reward. In his exaltation he would have laid his life down willingly for them both.

"That was a mere chance," said he, making light of his exploit with a forced laugh. "The whole affair was but the roughest cudgel-play from beginning to end. I, at least, have no cause to regret it, speaking in my secular capacity, for it led to an agreeable cruise and a sight of the most beautiful island in the world, where, I hope, I was fortunate enough to be of some service to Sir George in a manner more befitting my calling."

Again he forced himself to smile, addressing his speech to Lady Hamilton, without looking at her.

"And what of the new Court?" asked Cerise, observing his confusion with some astonishment, and kindly endeavouring to cover it. "Will the young king fulfil all the promise of his boyhood? They used to say he would grow up the image of Louis le Grand."

"The new Court," answered Florian lightly, "like all other new Courts, is the exact reverse of the old. To be in favour with the Regent is to be an eyesore to the king; to have served Louis le Grand faithfully, is to be wearisome, *rococo*, and behind the times; while, if a courtier wishes to bid for favour with the duke, he must forswear the rest of the royal family—go about drunk by daylight, and set at open defiance, not only the sacred moralities of life, but all the common decencies of society."

"The scum, then, comes well to the surface," observed Sir George, laughing. "It seems that in the respectable Paris of to-day there is a better chance than ever for a reprobate!"

"There is a way to fortune for honest men," answered the Jesuit, "that may be trodden now with every appearance of safety, and without the loss of self-esteem. It leads, in my

opinion, directly to success, and keeps the straight, unswerving path of honour all the time. The *Bashful Maid*, Sir George, used to lay her course faithfully by the compass, and I have often thought what a good example that inanimate figure-head showed to those who controlled her movements. But I must ask Lady Hamilton's pardon," he added, with mock gravity, "for thus mentioning her most formidable rival in her presence. If you can call to mind, madame, her resolute front, her coal-black hair, her glaring eyes, her complexion of rich vermilion, mantling even to the tip of her nose, and the devotion paid to her charms by captain as well as crew, you must despair of equalling her in Sir George's eyes, and can never know a moment's peace again."

Slap-Jack, clearing the table with much ceremony, could scarcely refrain from giving audible expression to his delight. Lady Hamilton laughed.

"As you have chosen such a subject of conversation," said she, "it is time for me to retire. After you have done justice to the charms of the *Bashful Maid*, whom, when she was not too lively, I admired as much as anyone, and have exhausted your musketeer's reminiscences, you will find me, and—what is more to the purpose—a dish of hot coffee, in the little room at the end of the gallery. Till then—*sans adieu!*"

And her ladyship walked out, laying her hand on Sir George's shoulder to prevent his rising while she passed, with an affectionate gesture that was in itself a caress. The Jesuit gazed after her as she disappeared, and, resuming his place at the table, felt that whatever difficulties he had already experienced, the worst part of his task was now to come.

CHAPTER XLIV

"BOX IT ABOUT"

WHEN the door had closed on his wife, Sir George settled himself comfortably in his chair, filled a bumper from the claret jug, and, passing it to Florian, proposed the accustomed toast, drunk at many hundred tables in merry England about the same hour.

"Church and King!" said the baronet, and quaffed off a goodly draught, as if he relished the liquor no less than the pledge.

It gave the Jesuit an opening, and, like a skilful fencer, he availed himself of it at once.

"The *true* Church," said he, wetting his lips with wine, "and the *true* King."

Sir George laughed, and looked round the hall.

"Ashore," he observed, "I respect every man's opinions, though nobody has a right to think differently from the skipper afloat; but let me tell you, my friend, such sentiments as your qualification implies had better be kept to yourself. They might shorten your visit at Hamilton, and even cause your journey to end at Traitor's Gate in the Tower of London."

He spoke in his usual reckless, good-humoured tone. Despite the warning, Florian perceived that the subject was neither dreaded nor discouraged by his host. He proceeded, therefore, to feel his ground cautiously, but with confidence.

"Your English Government," said he, "is doubtless on the watch, and with good reason. In the Trades, I remember, we used to say that the *Bashful Maid* might be left to steer herself, but when we got among the squalls of the Caribbean Sea, we kept a pretty sharp look-out, as you know, to shorten sail at a moment's warning. Your ship up there in London is not making very good weather of it even now, and the breeze is only springing up to-day that will freshen to a gale to-morrow. At least, so we think over the water. Perhaps we are misinformed."

Sir George raised his eyebrows, and pondered. He had guessed as much for some time. Though with so many new interests, he had busied himself of late but little with politics, yet it was not in his nature to be entirely unobservant of public affairs. He had seen plenty of clouds on the horizon, and knew they portended storms; but the old habits of military caution had not deserted him, and he answered carelessly—

"That depends on what you think, you know. These Jesuits—pardon me, comrade, I cannot help addressing you as a musketeer—these Jesuits sometimes know a great deal more than their prayers, but rather than prove mistaken, they will themselves create the complications they claim to have discovered. Frankly, you may speak out here. Our oak panels have no ears, and my servants are most of them deaf, and all faithful. What is the last infallible scheme at St. Omer? How many priests are stirring hard at the broth? How many marshals of France are longing to scald their mouths? Who is blowing the fire up, to keep it all hot and ensure the caldron's bubbling over at the right moment?"

Florian laughed.

"Greater names than you think for," he replied; "fewer priests, more marshals. Peers of France to light the fire, and a Prince of the Blood to take the cover off. Oh! trust me this is no *soupe maigre*. The stock is rich, the liquid savoury, and many a tempting morsel lies floating here and there for those who are not afraid of a dash with the flesh-hook, and will take their chance of burnt fingers in the process."

"That is all very well for people who are hungry," answered Sir George; "but when a man has dined, you can no longer tempt with a *ragoût*. The desire of a full man is to sit still and digest his food."

"Ambition has never dined," argued the other; "ambition is always hungry, and has the digestion of an ostrich. Like that insatiable bird, it can swallow an earl's patent, parchment, ribbon, seals, and all, thankfully and at a gulp!"

The baronet considered, took a draught of claret, and spoke out.

"Earls' patents don't go begging about in a Jesuit's pocket without reason; nor are they given to the first comer who asks, only because he can swallow them. Tell me honestly what you mean, Eugène—Florian. How am I to call you? With me you are as safe as in the confessional at St. Omer. But speak no more in parables. Riddles are my

aversion. A hidden meaning is as irritating as an ugly woman in a mask, and I never in my life could fence for ten minutes with an equal adversary, but I longed to take the buttons off the foils!"

Thus adjured, Florian proceeded to unfold the object of his mission.

"You were surprised, perhaps," said he, "to learn from Slap-Jack, who no doubt thought me a ghost till I spoke first, that your old comrade would be sitting with his legs at the same table as yourself this afternoon. You were gratified, I am sure, but you must have been puzzled. Now, Sir George, if you believe that my only reason for crossing the Channel, and riding post a couple of hundred miles, was that I might empty a stoup of this excellent claret in your company, you are mistaken."

He stopped, blushed violently, somewhat to his host's astonishment, and hid his confusion by replenishing his glass.

"I had another object of far more importance both to yourself and to your country. Besides this, I am but fulfilling the orders of my superiors. They employed me—Heaven knows why they employed me!" he broke out vehemently, "except that they thought you the dearest friend I had on earth. And so you are! and so you shall be! Listen, Sir George. The last person I spoke with before leaving France, had dined with Villeroy, previous to setting out for St. Omer. The young king had just seen the marshal, the latter was charged with his Majesty's congratulations to the King of England (the real King of England) on his infant's recovery. The boy who had been ailing is still in arms, and his Majesty asked if the young Prince Charles could speak yet? 'When he does,' said Villeroy, who has been a courtier for forty years, 'the first sentence he ought to say is God bless the King of France.' 'Not so,' answered his Majesty, laughing, 'let him learn the Jacobite countersign—Box it about, it will come to my father! If they only box it about enough,' he added, 'that child in arms should be as sure of the British crown as I am of the French!' This is almost a declaration in form. It is considered so in Paris. The king's sentiments can no longer be called doubtful, and with the strong party that I have every reason to believe exists in England disaffected to your present Government, surely the time for action has arrived. They thought so at St. Omer, in a conclave to which I am a mere mouthpiece. I should think so myself, might a humble novice presume to offer an opinion; and when the movement takes place, if Sir George Hamilton is

found where his blood, his antecedents, his high spi... and adventurous character are likely to lead him, I have authority to declare that he will be Sir George Hamilton no long... The earl's patent is already made out, which any mom... he pleases may be swallowed at a gulp, for digestion at... leisure. I have said my say; I have made a clean breast it; send for Slap-Jack and your venerable butler; put me irons; hand me over to your municipal authorities, if y... have any, and let them drag me to prison; but give m... another glass of that excellent claret first, for my throat dry with so much talking!"

Sir George laughed and complied.

"You are a plausible advocate, Florian," he observed after a moment's thought, "and your powers of argumen... are little inferior to your skill in fence. But this is a lee... shore, my good friend, to which you are driving, a lee-shor... with bad anchorage, shoal water, and thick weather all round I like to keep the lead going on such a course, and only to carry sail enough for steerage-way. As far as I am concerned, I should wish to see them 'box it about' a little longer, before I made up my mind how the game would go!"

"That is not like you!" exclaimed the Jesuit hotly. "The Hamiltons have never yet waited to draw till they knew which was the winning side."

"No man shall say that of me," answered the other, in a stern, almost an angry tone, and for a space, the two old comrades sat sipping their wine in silence.

Sir George had spoken the truth when he said that a full man is willing to sit still—at least as far as his own inclinations were concerned. He had nothing to gain by a change, and everything to lose, should that change leave him on the beaten side. Moreover, he relished the advantages of his present position far more than had he been born with the silver spoon in his mouth. Then, perhaps, he would have depreciated the luxury of plate and believed that the pewter he had not tried might be equally agreeable. People who have never been really hungry hardly understand the merits of a good dinner. You must sleep on the bare ground for a week or two before you know the value of sheets and blankets and a warm soft bed. Sir George had got into safe anchorage now, and it required a strong temptation to lure him out to sea again. True, the man's habits were those of an adventurer. He had led a life of action from the day he first accompanied his father across the Channel in an open boat, at six years old, till he found himself a

rous, wealthy, disengaged country gentleman at Hamilton Hill. He might grow tired of that respectable station—it was very likely he would—but not yet. The novelty was still pleasant; the ease, the leisure, the security, the freedom from anxiety, were delightful to a man who had never before been "off duty," so to speak, in his life. Then he enjoyed above all things the field sports of the wild country in which he lived. His hawks were the best within a hundred miles. His hounds, hardy, rough, steady, and untiring, would follow a lean travelling fox from dawn to dark of the short November day, and make as good an account of him at last as of a fat wide-antlered stag under the blazing sun of August. He had some interest, some excitement for every season as it passed. If all his broad acres were not fertile in corn, he owned wide meres covered with wild-fowl, streams in which trout and grayling leaped in the soft May mornings, like raindrops in a shower, where the otter lurked and vanished, where the noble salmon himself came arrowing up triumphant from the sea. Woods, too, in which the stately red deer found a shelter, and swelling hills of purple heather, where the moorcock pruned his wing, and the curlew's plaintive wail died off in the surrounding wilderness.

All this afforded pleasant pastime, none the less pleasant that his limbs were strong, his health robust, and the happy, hungry sportsman could return at sundown to a comfortable house, an excellent table, and a cellar good enough for the Pope. Such material comforts are not to be despised—least of all by men who have known the want of them. Ask any old campaigner whether he does not appreciate warmth, food, and shelter; even idleness, so long as the effects of previous fatigue remain. These things may pall after a time, but until they *do* so pall they are delightful, and not to be relinquished but for weighty motives, nor even then without regret.

Sir George, too, in taking a wife, had "given pledges to fortune," as Lord Bacon hath it. He loved Cerise very dearly, and although an elevating affection for a worldly object will never make a man a coward, it tones down all the wild recklessness of his nature, and bids the boldest hesitate ere he risks his earthly treasure even at the call of ambition. It is the sore heart that seeks an anodyne in the excitement of danger and the confusion of tumultuous change.

Moreover, men's habits of thought are acted on far more

easily than they will admit, by the opinions of those amongst whom they live. Sir George's friends and neighbours, the honest country gentlemen with whom he cheered his hounds or killed his game abroad, and drank his claret at home, were enthusiastic Jacobites in theory, but loyal and quiet subjects of King George in practice. They inherited, indeed, much of the high feeling, and many of the chivalrous predilections that had instigated their grandfathers and great-grandfathers to strike desperately for King Charles at Marston Moor and Naseby Field, but they inherited also the sound sense that was often found lurking under the cavalier's love-locks, the dogged patriotism, and strong affection for their Church, which filled those hearts that beat so stoutly behind laced shirts and buff coats when opposed to Cromwell and his Ironsides. With the earlier loyalists, to uphold the Stuart was to fight for principle, property, personal freedom, and liberty of conscience, but to support his grandson now was a different matter altogether. His cause had but one argument in its favour, and that was the magic of a name. To take up arms on his behalf was to lose lands, position, possibly life, if defeated, of which catastrophe there seemed every reasonable prospect; while, in the event of victory, there was too much ground to suppose that the reward of these efforts would be to see the Church of England, the very institution for which they had been taught by their fathers to shed their blood, oppressed, persecuted, and driven from her altars by the Church of Rome.

As in a long and variable struggle between two wrestlers, each of the great contending parties might now be said to stand upon the adversary's ground, their tactics completely altered, their positions exactly reversed. It was only in the free intercourse of conviviality, with feelings roused by song, or brains heated by claret, that the bulk of these Northern country gentlemen ever thought of alluding to the absent family in terms of affection and regret. They were for the most part easy in their circumstances and happy in their daily course of life; their heads were safe, their rents rising, and they were satisfied to leave well alone.

George had that day met some dozen of his new companions, neighbouring gentlemen with whom he was now on friendly and familiar terms, at a cock-fight; this little assemblage represented fairly enough the tone of feeling that prevailed through the whole district, these jovial squires might be taken as fair representatives of their order in half a dozen counties north of the Trent. As he passed them

mentally in review, one by one, he could not think of a single individual likely to listen favourably to such proposals as Florian seemed empowered to make, at least at an earlier hour than three in the afternoon. When dinner was pretty well advanced, many men, in those days, were wont to display an enthusiastic readiness for any wild scheme broached, irrespective of their inability to comprehend its bearings, and their impatience of its details; but when morning brought headache and reflection, such over-hasty partisans were, of all others, the least disposed to encounter the risk, the expense, and especially the trouble, entailed by another Jacobite rising in favour of the Stuarts. Sir George could think of none who, in sober earnest, would subscribe a shilling to the cause, or bring a single mounted soldier into the field.

There was also one more reason, touching his self-interest very closely, which rendered Sir George Hamilton essentially an upholder of the existing state of things. He had broad acres, indeed, but the men with broad acres have never in the history of our country been averse to meddling with public affairs—they have those acres to look to in every event. If worst comes to worst, sequestration only lasts while the enemy remains in power, and landed property, though it may elude its owner for a while, does not vanish entirely off the face of the earth. But Sir George had made considerable gains during his seafaring career, with the assistance of the *Bashful Maid*, and these he had invested in a flourishing concern, which, under the respectable title of the Bank of England, has gone on increasing in prosperity to the present day. The Bank of England had lent large sums of money to the Government, and as a revolution would have forced it to stop payment, Sir George, even if he had chosen to accept his earl's patent, must have literally bought it with all the hard cash he possessed in the world. Such a consideration alone would have weighed but little, for he was neither a timid man nor a covetous; but when, with his habitual quickness of thought, he reviewed the whole position, scanning all its difficulties at a glance, he made up his mind that unless his old lieutenant had some more dazzling bait to offer than an earl's coronet, he would not entertain his proposals seriously for a moment.

"And what have you to gain?" he asked good-humouredly, after the short silence, during which each had been busy with his own meditations. "What do they offer the zealous Jesuit priest in consideration of his services,

supposing those services are successful? What will they give you? the command of the bodyguard in London, or the fleet at Sheerness? Will they make you a councillor, a colonel, or a commodore? Lord Mayor of London, or Archbishop of Canterbury? On my honour, Florian, I believe you are capable of filling any one of these posts with infinite credit. Something has been promised you, surely, were it only a pair of scarlet hose and a cardinal's hat."

"Nothing! as I am a gentleman and a priest!" answered Florian eagerly. "My advocacy is but for your own sake! For the aggrandisement of yourself and those who love you! For the interests of loyalty and the true religion!"

"You were always an enthusiast," answered the baronet kindly, "and enthusiasts in every cause are juggled out of their reward. Take a leaf from the book of your employers, and remember their own watchword: 'Box it about, it will come to my father.' Do you let them box it about, till it has nearly reached the—the—well—the claimant of the British crown, and when he has opened his hands to seize the prize, *you* give it the last push that sends it into his grasp—the Pope could not offer you better counsel. If you have drunk enough claret, let us go to our coffee in Lady Hamilton's boudoir."

But Florian excused himself on the plea of fatigue and business. He had letters to write, he said, which was perfectly true, though they might well have been postponed for a day, or even a week—but he wanted an hour's solitude to survey his position, to look steadily on the future, and determine how far he should persevere in the course on which he had embarked. Neither had he courage to face Cerise again so soon. He felt anxious, agitated, unnerved, by her very presence, and the sound of her voice. To-morrow he would feel more like himself. To-morrow he could learn to look upon her as she must always be to him in future, the wife of his friend. Of course, he argued, this task would become easier day by day; and so, to begin it, he leaned out of window, watching the stars come one by one into view, breathing the perfume from the late autumn flowers in her garden, and thinking that, while to him she was more beautiful than the star, more lovable than the flower, he might as well hope to reach the one as to pluck her like the other, and wear her for himself. Still, he resolved that his affection, mad, hopeless as it was, should never exceed the limits he had marked out. He would watch over her steps and secure her happiness; he would make her husband

great and noble for her sake; everything belonging to her should be for him a sacred and inviolable trust. He would admire her as an angel, and adore her as a saint! It was good, he thought, for both of them, that he was a priest!

Enthusiasm in all but the cause of Heaven is, indeed, usually juggled out of its reward, and Sir George had read Florian's character aright when he called him an enthusiast.

CHAPTER XLV

THE LITTLE RIFT

From Lady Hamilton to Madame la Marquise de Montmirail.

MY VERY DEAR MAMMA, — You shall not again have cause to complain of my negligence in writing, nor to accuse me of forgetting my own dear mother, amongst all the new employments and dissipations of my English home.

"You figure to yourself that both are extremely engrossing, and so numerous that I have not many moments to spare, even for the most sacred of duties. Of employments, yes, these are indeed plentiful, and recur day by day. Would you like to know what they are? At seven every morning my coffee is brought by an English maid, who stares at me open-mouthed while I drink it, and wonders I do not prefer to breakfast like herself, directly I am up, on salt beef and small beer. She has not yet learned any of my dresses by name; and when she fastens my hair, her hands tremble so, that it all comes tumbling about my shoulders long before I can get downstairs. She is stupid, awkward, slow, but gentle, willing, and rather pretty. Somehow I cannot help loving her, though I wish with all my heart she was a better maid.

"If George has not already gone out on some sporting expedition—and he is passionately fond of such pursuits, perhaps because they relieve the monotony of married life, which, I fear, is inexpressibly tedious to men like him, who have been accustomed to constant excitement—I find him in the great hall eating as if he were famished, and in a prodigious hurry to be off. I fill him his cup of claret with my own hands, for my darling says he can only drink wine in the morning when I pour it out for him myself; and before

I have time to ask a single question he is in the saddle and gallops off. Mamma, I *never* have time to ask him any questions. I suppose men are always so busy. I sometimes think I too should like to have been a man. Perhaps, then, this large, dark, over-furnished house would not look so gloomy when he is gone. Perhaps, too, the housekeeper would not tell me such long stories about what they did in the time when Barbara, Lady Hamilton, reigned here. By all accounts she must have been an ogress, with a mania for accumulating linen. You will laugh at me, dear mamma—you who never feared the face of any human being—but I am a little afraid of this good Dame Diaper, and so glad when our interview is over. I wish I had more courage. George must think me such a coward, he who is so brave. I heard him say the other day that the finest sight he ever saw in his life was the *beautiful marquise* (meaning you, mamma) at bay. I asked him if he did not see poor frightened me at a sad disadvantage? and he answered by— No, I won't tell you how he answered. Ah! dear mother, I always wished to be like you from the time I was a little girl. Every day now I wish it more and more. After my release from Dame Diaper I go to the garden and look at my Provence roses—there are seven buds to flower yet; and the autumn here, though finer than I expected, is much colder than in France. Then I walk out and visit my poor. I wish I could understand their *patois* better, but I am improving day by day.

"The hours do not pass by very quick till three o'clock; but at three we dine, and George is sure to be back, often bringing a friend with him who stays all night, for in this country the gentlemen do not like travelling after dinner, and perhaps they are very right. When we have guests I see but little of George again till supper-time, and then I am rather tired, and he is forced to attend to his company, so that I have no opportunity of conversing with him. Would you believe it, mamma, for three days I have wanted to speak to him about an alteration in my garden, and we have never yet had a spare five minutes to go and look at it together?

"Our employments in England, you see, are regular, and perhaps a little monotonous, but they are gaiety itself, compared with our amusements. I like these English, or rather, I should say, I respect them (mind, mamma, I do not call my husband a regular Englishman), but I think when they amuse themselves they appear to the greatest disadvantage.

THE LITTLE RIFT

We were invited, George and I, the other day, to dine with our neighbour, Sir Marmaduke Umpleby. Heavens! what a strange name! We started at noon, because he lives three leagues off, and the roads are infamous; they are not paved like ours, but seem mere tracks through the fields and across the moor. It rained the whole journey; and though we had six horses, we stuck twice and were forced to get out and walk. George carried me in his arms that I might not wet my feet, and swore horribly, but with good-humour, and only, as he says, *en mousquetaire!* I was not a bit frightened—I never am with him. At last there we are arrived, a party of twenty to meet us, and dinner already served. I am presented to every lady in turn—there are nine of them—and they all shake hands with me; but, after that, content themselves with hoping I am not wet, and then they stare—how they stare! as if I were some wild animal caught in a trap. I do not know where to look. You cannot think, mamma, what a difference there is between a society in England and with us. The gentlemen are then presented to me, and I like these far better than the ladies; they are rather awkward perhaps and unpolished in manner, but they seem gentlemen at heart, terribly afraid of a woman, one and all, yet respecting her, obviously because she *is* a woman; and though they blush, and stammer, and tread on your dress, something seems to tell you that they are really ready to sacrifice for you their own vanity and convenience. This is to me more flattering than the external politeness of our French gallants, who bow indeed with an air of inimitable courtesy, and use the most refined phrases, while all the time they are saying things that make you feel quite hot. Now, George never puts one in a false position—I mean, he never used. He has an Englishman's heart, and the manners of a French prince; but then, you know there is nobody like my own musketeer.

"At last we go to dinner. Such a dinner! Enormous joints of sheep and oxen steaming under one's very nose! In England, to amuse oneself, it is not only necessary to have prodigious quantities to eat, but one must also sit among the smoke and savour of the dishes till they are consumed. It took away my appetite completely, and I think my fan has smelt of beef ever since. I sat next Sir Marmaduke, and he good-naturedly endeavoured to make conversation for me by talking of Paris and the Regent's Court. His ideas of our manners and customs were odd, to say the least, and he seemed quite surprised to learn that unmarried ladies never went into general society alone, and even married ones

usually with their husbands. I hope he has a better opinion of us now. I am quite sure the poor old gentleman thought the proprieties were sadly disregarded in Paris till I enlightened him.

"The English ladies are scrupulously correct in their demeanour; they are, I do believe, the most excellent of wives and mothers; but oh! mamma, to be virtuous, is it necessary to be so ill-dressed? When we left the gentlemen to their wine, which is always done here, and which, I think, must be very beneficial to the wine-trade, we adjourned to a large cold room, where we sat in a circle, and had nothing to do but look at each other. I thought I had never seen so many bright colours so tastelessly put together. My hostess herself, a fresh, well-preserved woman of a certain age, wore a handsome set of amethysts with a purple dress—amethysts and purple! great Heaven! It would have driven Célandine mad!

"It was dull—figure to yourself how dull—nine women waiting for their nine husbands, and not a subject in common except the probability of continued rain! Still we talked—it must be admitted we contrived to talk—and after a while the gentlemen appeared, and supper came; so the day was over at last, and next morning we were to go home. Believe me, I was not sorry.

"Yesterday we had a visitor, and imagine if he was welcome, since he brought me news of my dear mamma. He had seen madame la marquise passing the Palais Royal in her coach before she left Paris for Touraine. 'How was she looking?' 'As she always does, avowedly the most beautiful lady in France.' 'Like a damask rose,' says George, with a laugh at poor pale me. Our visitor did not speak to madame, for he has not the honour of her acquaintance; 'but it is enough to see her once in a season,' said he, 'and do homage from a distance.' Was not all this very polite, and very prettily expressed? Now can you guess who this admirer of yours may be? I will give you ten chances; I will give you a hundred. Monsieur de St. Croix! the priest who was my director at the convent, and who appeared so opportunely at the little white chapel above Port Welcome. Is it not strange that he should be here now? I have put him into the oak room on the *entresol*, because it is warm and quiet, and he looks so pale and ill. He is the mere shadow of what he used to be, and I should hardly have known him but for his dark expressive eyes. So different from George, who is the picture of health, and handsomer, I think, than ever. He (I mean Monsieur de St. Croix) is very agreeable

and full of French news. He is also an excellent gardener, and helps me out-of-doors almost every day, now that George is so much occupied. He says that the priests of his Order learn to do everything; and I believe if I asked him to dress an omelette, he would manage to accomplish it. At least, I am sure he would try. To-day he has gone to see some of his colleagues who have an establishment far up in the dales, as we call them here, and George is out with his hawks, so I am rather dull; but do not think that is the reason I have sat down to write you this foolish letter. Next to hearing from you, it is my greatest pleasure to tell you all about myself, and fancy that I am speaking to you even at this great distance. Think of me, dear mamma, very often, for scarcely an hour passes that I do not think of you."

The letter concluded with an elaborate account of a certain white dress, the result of a successful combination, in which lace, muslin, and cherry-coloured ribbons formed the principal ingredients, which George had admired very much—not, however, until his attention was called to it by the wearer—and which was put on for the first time the day of Monsieur de St. Croix's arrival.

Madame de Montmirail received this missive in little more than a week after it was written, and replied at once.

Madame de Montmirail to Lady Hamilton.

"It rejoiced me so much to hear from you, my dear child. I was getting anxious about your health, your spirits, a thousand things that I think of continually; for my darling Cerise is never out of my mind. What you say of your society amuses me, and I can well imagine my shy girl feeling lost amongst an assemblage of awkward gentlemen and stupid ladies, far more than in a Court ball at the Palais Royal, or a reception at Marly as it used to be; alas! as it will be no more. When you are as old as I am—for I am getting very old now, as you would say if you could see me closeted every morning over my accounts with my intendant—when you are as old as I am, you will have learned that there is very little difference between one society and another, so long as people are of a certain class, of course, and do not eat with their knives. Manner is but a trick, easily acquired if we begin young, but impossible to learn after thirty. Real politeness, which is a different thing altogether, is but good nature in its best clothes, and consists chiefly in the faculty of putting oneself in another person's place, and the wish to

do as one would be done by. I have often seen people with very bad manners exceedingly polite. I have also even oftener seen the reverse. If you do not suffer yourself to find these English tedious, you will extract from them plenty of amusement; and the talent of being easily entertained is one to be cultivated to the utmost. Even in Paris, they tell me to-day, such a talent would be most enviable; for all complain of the dulness pervading society, and the oppressive influence of the Court. I cannot speak from my own observation, for I have been careful to go nowhere while in the capital, and to retire to my estates here in Touraine as quickly as possible. I have not even seen the prince-marshal, nor do I feel that my spirits would be good enough to endure his importunate kindness. I hear, moreover, that he devotes himself now to Mademoiselle de Villeroy, the old marshal's youngest daughter; so you will accuse me of pique rather than ingratitude.

"I am not unhappy here, for I think I like a country life. My intendant is excessively stupid, and supplies me with constant occupation. I pass my mornings in business, and see my housekeeper too, but am not the least afraid of her, and I write an infinity of letters, some of them to Montmirail West. Célandine is still there with her husband, and they have got the estate once more under cultivation. Had I left it immediately after the revolt, I am persuaded every acre of it would have passed out of our possession. We had a narrow escape, my darling, though I think I could have held out five minutes longer; but I shall never forget the flash of Sir George's sword as he leaped in, nor, I think, will *you*. He is a brave man, my child, and a resolute. Such are the easiest for a woman to manage; but still the art of guiding a husband is not unlike that of ruling a horse. You must adapt yourself instinctively to his movements; but, although you should never seem mistrustful, you must not altogether abandon the rein. Whilst you feel it gently, he has all imaginable liberty; but you know *exactly where he is*. Above all, never wound yours in his self-love. He would not show he was hurt, but the injury with him would, therefore, be incurable. I do not think he would condescend to expostulate, or to give you a chance of explanation; but day by day you would find yourselves farther and farther apart. You would be miserable, and perhaps so would he. You will wonder that I should have studied his character so carefully; but is not your happiness now the first, my only object, in the world?

"Monsieur de St. Croix seems to be an agreeable addition

to your family *tête-à-tête.* Not that such an addition can be already required; but I suppose, as an old comrade and friend, your husband cannot but entertain him so long as he chooses to remain. Was not he the man with the romantic story, who had been priest, fencing-master, pirate, what shall I say? and priest again? I cannot imagine such avocations imparting a deeper knowledge of flowers than is possessed by your own gardener at home; and if I were in your place, I should on no account permit him to interfere with the omelette in any way. Neither in a flower-garden nor a kitchen is a priest in his proper place. I think yours would be better employed in the saddle *en route* for St. Omer, or wherever his college is established.

"Talking of the last-named place reminds me of Malletort. The abbé, strange to say, has thrown himself into the arms of the Jesuits. Though I have seen him repeatedly, I cannot learn his intentions, nor the nature of his schemes, for scheme he will, I know, so long as his brain can think. He talks of absence from France, and hints at a mission from the Order to some savage climes; but if he anticipates martyrdom, which I cannot easily believe, his spirits are wonderfully little depressed by the prospect, and he seems, if possible, more sarcastic than ever. He even rode with me after dinner the last time he was here, and asked me a thousand questions about you. I ride by myself now, and I like it better. I can wander about these endless woods, and think—think. What else is left when the time to act is gone by?

"You tell me little about Sir George; his health, his looks, his employments. Does he mingle with the society of the country? Does he interest himself in politics? Whatever his pursuits, I am sure he will take a leading part. Give him my kindest regards. You will both come and see me here some day before very long. Write again soon to your loving mother. They brought me a half-grown fawn last week from the top of the Col Saint-Jacques, where you dropped your glove into the waterfall. We are trying to tame it in the garden, and I call it Cerise."

No letter could be more affectionate, more motherly. Why did Lady Hamilton shed the first tears of her married life during its perusal? She wept bitterly, confessed she was foolish, nervous, hysterical; read it over once more, and wept again. Then she bathed her eyes, as she used at the convent, but without so satisfactory a result, smoothed her hair, composed her features, and went downstairs.

Florian had been absent all the morning. He had again ridden abroad to meet a conclave of his Order, held at an old abbey far off amongst the dales, and was expected back to dinner. It now occurred to her, for the first time, that the hours passed less quickly in his absence. She was provoked at the thought, and attributed her ill-humour, somewhat unfairly, to her mother's letter. The tears nearly sprang to her eyes again, but she sent them back with an effort, and descended the wide old staircase in an uncomfortable, almost an irritable, frame of mind, for which she could give no reason even to herself.

Strange to say, George was waiting for her in the hall. He had returned wet from hunting, and was now dressed and ready for dinner a few minutes before the usual time. Florian had not yet made his appearance.

"What has become of our priest?" called out the baronet good-humouredly, as his wife descended the stairs. "I thought, Cerise, he was tied to your apron-strings, and would never be absent at this hour of the day. I wish he may not have met with some disaster," he added more gravely; "there are plenty of hawks even in this out-of-the-way place, to whom Florian's capture, dead or alive, would be worth a purse of gold!"

It was impossible to help it, coming thus immediately on her mother's letter, and although she was fiercely angry with herself for the weakness, Cerise blushed down to the very tips of her fingers. George could not but remark her confusion, and observed, at the same time, that her eyelids were red from recent tears. He looked surprised, but his voice was kindly and reassuring as usual.

"Good heavens, my darling! What has happened?" he asked, putting his arm round her waist. "You have had bad news, or you are ill, or something is amiss!"

She was as pale now as she had been crimson a moment before. How could she explain to him the cause of her confusion? How could she hope to make a man understand her feelings? Her first impulse was to produce her mother's letter, but the remarks in it about their guest prevented her following so wise a course, and yet if she ignored it altogether would not this be the first secret from her husband? No wonder she turned pale. It seemed as if her mother's warning were required already. In such a dilemma she floundered, of course, deeper and deeper. By way of changing the subject, she caught at her husband's suggestion and exclaimed, with her pale face and tearful eyes—

"Capture! Monsieur de St. Croix captured! Heavens, George, we cannot go to dinner unconcerned if our guest is in real danger. You can save him—you *must* save him. What shall we do?"

He had withdrawn his arm from her waist. He looked her scrutinisingly in the face, and then turned away to the window.

"Make yourself easy, Cerise," he answered coldly. "I see him riding up the avenue. Your suspense will be over in less than five minutes now."

Then he began to play with the hawk on its perch, teasing the bird, and laughing rather boisterously at its ruffled plumage and impotent anger.

She felt she had offended, though she scarcely knew how, and after a moment's consideration determined to steal behind him, put her arms round his neck and tell him so. The very conflict showed she loved him, the victory over her own heart's pride proved how dearly, but unfortunately at this moment Florian entered full of apologies for being late, followed by Slap-Jack and a line of servants bringing dinner.

Unfortunately, also, and according to the usual fatality in such cases, Monsieur de St. Croix addressed most of his conversation to Lady Hamilton during the meal, and she could not but betray by her manner an embarrassment she had no cause to feel. Sir George may possibly have observed this, some womanly intuition told Cerise that he did, but his bearing was frank and good-humoured to both, though he filled his glass perhaps oftener than usual, and laughed a little louder than people do who are quite at ease. The wife's quick ear, no doubt, detected so much, and it made her wretched. She loved him very dearly, and it seemed so hard that without any fault of her own she should thus mark "the little rift within the lute," threatening her with undeserved discord; "the little pitted speck in garnered fruit," eating into all the bloom and promise of her life.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE MUSIC MUTE

WHEN Cerise found herself alone, she naturally read her mother's letter once again, and made a variety of resolutions for her future conduct which she could not but acknowledge were derogatory to her own dignity the while. It was her duty, she told herself, to yield to her husband's prejudices, however unreasonable; to give way to him in this, as in every other difference of married life—for she felt it *was* a difference, though expressed only by a turn of his eyebrow, a contraction of his lip—and to trample her own pride under foot when he required it, however humiliating and disagreeable it might be to herself. If George was so absurd as to think she showed an over-anxiety for the safety of their guest, why, she must bear with his folly because he was her husband, and school her manner to please him, as she schooled her thoughts. After all, was she not interested in Florian only as his friend? What was it—what *could* it be to her, if the priest were carried off to York Gaol, or the Tower of London, to-morrow? Lady Hamilton passed very rapidly over this extreme speculation, and perhaps she was right; though it is easy to convince yourself by argument that you are uninterested in anyone, the actual process of your thoughts is apt to create something very like a special interest which increases in proportion to the multitude of reasons adduced against its possibility, and that which was but a phantom when you sat down to consider it has grown into a solid and tangible substance when you get up. Lady Hamilton, therefore, was discreet in reverting chiefly to what her husband thought of her, not to what she thought of Monsieur de St. Croix.

"He is jealous!" she said to herself, clasping her hands with an emotion that was not wholly without pleasure. "Jealous, poor fellow, and that shows he loves me. Ah! he little knows! he little knows!"

By the time the two gentlemen had finished their wine,

and come to her small withdrawing-room, according to custom, for coffee, Cerise had worked herself up into a high state of self-sacrifice and wife-like devotion. It created rather a reaction to find that Sir George's manner was as cordial and open as ever. He was free with his guest, and familiar with herself, laughing and jesting as if the cloud that had overshadowed his spirits before dinner was now completely passed away and forgotten. She was a little disappointed—a little provoked. After all, then, what mountains had she been making of mole-hills! What a deep grief and abject penitence that had been to her, which was but a chance moment of ill-humour, an unconsidered thoughtless whim of her husband, and what a fool had she been so to distress herself, and to resolve that she would even relax the rules of good breeding—fail in the common duties of hospitality, for such a trifle!

She conversed with Florian, therefore, as usual, which was a little. She listened to him also as usual, which was a good deal. Sir George forced the thought from his mind again and again, yet he could not get rid of it. "How bright Cerise looks when he is talking to her! I never saw her so amused and interested in anyone before!"

Now, Monsieur de St. Croix's life at Hamilton Hill ought to have been sufficiently agreeable, if it be true that the real way to make time pass pleasantly is to alternate the labour of the head and the hands; to be daily engaged in some work of importance, varied by periods of relaxation and moderate excitement. Florian's correspondence usually occupied him for several hours in the morning, and it was remarked that the voluminous packets he received and transmitted were carried by special couriers who arrived and departed at stated times. Some of the correspondence was in cipher, most of it in French, with an English translation, and it seemed to refer principally to the geological formation of the neighbourhood, though a line or two of political gossip interspersed would relieve the dryness of that profound subject. Perhaps many of these packets, ciphers, scientific information, and all, were intended to be read by the authorities at St. James's. Perhaps every courier was entrusted with a set of despatches on purpose to be seized, and a line in the handle of his whip, a word or two spoken in apparent jest, a mere sign that might be forwarded to a confederate looker-on, signifying the real gist of his intelligence. At anyrate the papers required a deal of preparation, and Florian was seldom able to accompany

his host on the sporting expeditions in which the latter took such delight.

Sir George, then, would be off soon after daylight, to return at dinner-time, and in a whole fortnight had not yet found that spare five minutes for a visit to Lady Hamilton's garden, while Florian would be at leisure by noon, and naturally devoted himself to the service of his hostess for the rest of the day. They read together—they walked together—they gardened together. Some of those special packets that arrived from France, even contained certain seeds which Cerise had expressed a wish to possess, and they talked of their future crop, and the result of their joint labours next year, as if Florian had become an established member of the family, and was never to depart.

This mode of life might have been interrupted by her ladyship's misgivings at first, but she reflected that it would be absurd for her to discontinue an agreeable companionship of which her husband obviously approved, only because she had misapplied her mother's letter, or her mother had misunderstood hers; also it is difficult to resume coldness and reserve, where we have given, and wish to give, confidence and friendship, so Florian and Cerise were to be seen every fine day on the terrace at Hamilton Hill hard at work, side by side, like brother and sister, over the same flower-bed.

"Florian!" she would say, for Cerise had so accustomed herself to his Christian name in talking of him with her husband, that she did not always call him Monsieur de St. Croix to his face. "Florian! come and help me to tie up this rose-tree—there, hold the knot while I fasten it—now run and fetch me the scissors, they are lying by my flowers on the step. Quick—or it will slip out of my hands! So *there* is my Provence rose at last—truly a rose without a thorn!"

And Florian did her bidding like a dog, watched her eye, followed her about, and seemed to take a dog's pleasure in the mere fact of being near her. His reward, too, was much the same as that faithful animal's, a kind word, a bright look, a wave of the white hand, denoting a mark of approval rather than a caress. Sometimes, for a minute or two, he could almost fancy he was happy.

And Sir George—did Sir George approve of this constant intercourse, this daily companionship? Were his hawks and his hounds, his meetings with his neighbours for the administration of justice and the training of militia, for the excitement of a cock-fight or the relaxation of a bowling-match,

"They gardened together."

so engrossing that he never thought of his fair young wife, left for hours in that lonely mansion on the hill to her own thoughts and the society of a Jesuit priest? It was hard to say—Sir George Hamilton's disposition was shrewd though noble, ready to form suspicion but disdaining to entertain it, prone more than another to suffer from misplaced confidence, but the last in the world to confess its injuries even to himself.

He had never seemed more energetic, never showed better spirits than now. His hawks struck their quarry, his hounds ran into their game, his horses carried him far ahead of his fellow-sportsmen. His advice was listened to at their meetings, his opinions quoted at their tables, his popularity was at its height with all the country gentlemen of the neighbourhood. He cheered lustily in the field, and drank his bottle fairly at the fireside, yet all the time, under that smooth brow, that jovial manner, that comely cheek, there lurked a something which turned the chase to penance, and the claret to gall.

He was not jealous, far from it. *He* jealous—what degradation! and of Cerise—what sacrilege! No, it was not jealousy that thus obtruded its shadow over those sunny moors, athwart that fair autumn sky; it was more a sense of self-reproach, of repentance, of remorse, as if he had committed some injustice to a poor helpless being, that he could never now repay. A lower nature incapable of the sentiment would in its inferiority have been spared much needless pain. It was as if he had wounded a child, a lamb, or some such weak lovable creature, by accident, and could not stanch the wound. It would have been cowardly had he meant it, but he did not mean it, and it was only clumsy; yet none the less was he haunted by the patient eyes, the mute appealing sorrow that spoke so humbly to his heart.

What if this girl, whose affection he had never doubted, did really not love him after all? What if the fancy that he knew she had entertained for him was but a girl's fancy for the first man who had roused her vanity and flattered her self-esteem? It might be that she had only prized him because she had seen so few others, that her ideal was something quite different, he said in bitterness of spirit, to a rough ignorant soldier, a mere hunting, hawking, north-country baronet, whose good qualities, if he had any, were but a blunt honesty, and an affection for herself he had not the wit to express; whose personal advantages did but

consist in a strong arm, and a weather-browned cheek, like any ploughman on his estate. Perhaps the man who would really have suited her was of a different type altogether, a refined scholar, an accomplished courtier, one who could overlay a masculine understanding with the graceful trickeries of a woman's fancy, who could talk to her of sentiment, romance, affinity of spirits, and congeniality of character. Such a man as this pale-faced priest—not him in particular, that had nothing to do with it! but someone like him—there were hundreds of them whom she might meet at any time. It was not that he thought she loved another, but that the possibility now dawned of her not loving him.

He did not realise this at first. It was long before he could bring himself to look such a privation in the face—the blank it would make in his own life was too chilling to contemplate—and to do him justice his first thought was not of his own certain misery, but of her lost chances of happiness. If now, when it was too late, she should find one whom she could really love, had he not stood between her and the light? Would he not be the clog round her neck, the curse rather than the blessing of her existence? Of all this he was vaguely conscious, not actually thinking out his reflections, far less expressing them, but aware, nevertheless, of some deadening, depressing influence that weighed him down like a nightmare, from which, morning after morning, he never woke. But this inner life which all men must live, affected the outer not at all. Sir George flung his hawks aloft and cheered his hounds with unabated zest, while Florian held Lady Hamilton's scissors, and helped to tie up her roses, under the grey and gold of the soft autumnal sky.

They had a thousand matters to talk about, a thousand reminiscences in common, now that the old intimacy had returned. On many points they thought alike, and discoursed pleasantly enough; on many they differed, and it was to these, I think, that they reverted with the keenest relish again and again. Cerise was a rigid Catholic—the more so now that she lived in a Protestant country, and with a husband whose antecedents had taught him to place little value on the mere external forms of religion. One of the dogmas on which she chiefly insisted was the holiness of the Church, and the separation of the clergy from all personal interests in secular pursuits.

"A priest," said Cerise, snipping off the ends of the matting with which she had tied up her rose-tree, "a priest is priest *avant tout*—that of course. But in my opinion his

character is not one bit less sacred outside, in the street, than when he is saying high mass before the altar. He should never approach the line of demarcation that separates him from the layman. So long as he thinks only the thoughts of the Church, and speaks her words, he is infallible. When he expresses his own opinions and yields to his own feelings, he is no longer the priest, but the man. He might as well, perhaps better, be a courtier or a musketeer!"

He stooped low down over the rose-tree, and his voice was very sad and gentle while he replied—

"Far better—far better—a labourer, a lackey, or a shoeblack. It is a cruel lot to bear a yoke that is too heavy for the neck, and to feel that it can never be taken off. To sit in a prison looking into your empty grave and knowing there is no escape till you fill it—perhaps not even then—while all the time the children are laughing at their play outside, and the scent of the summer roses comes in through the bars—the summer roses that your hands shall never reach, your lips shall never press! Ah! that is the ingenuity of the torture, when perhaps, to wear one of these roses in your bosom for an hour, you would barter your priesthood here, and your soul hereafter!"

"It must be hard sometimes," answered Cerise kindly—"very hard; but is not that the whole value of the ordeal? What do *we* give up for our faith—even we poor women, who hold ourselves good Catholics?—three hours at most in the week, and a slice of the sirloin or the haunch on Friday. Oh, Florian, it is dreadful to me to think how little I can do to further the work of the Church! I feel as if a thousand strong men were pulling, with all their might, at a load, and I could only put one of my poor weak fingers on the rope for a second at a time."

"My daughter," he answered, assuming at once the sacerdotal character, "the weakest efforts, rendered with a will, are counted by the Church with the strongest. St. Clement says that 'if one, going on his daily business, shall move out of his way but two steps towards the altar, he shall not be without his reward.' Submit yourself to the Church and her ministers, in thought, word, and deed, so will she take your burden on her own shoulders, and be answerable for your welfare in this world and the next."

It was the old dangerous doctrine he had learned by rote and repeated to so many penitents during his ministration. He saw the full influence of it now, and wished, for one wild moment, that he could be a better Christian, or—a worse!

But when she turned her eyes on him so hopefully, so trustfully, the evil spirit was rebuked, and came out of the man, tearing him the while, and almost tempting him to curse her —the woman he worshipped—because, for the moment, her face was "as the face of an angel." He had a mind then to return to St. Omer at once—to trust himself no longer with this task, this duty, this penance, whatever their cruelty chose to call it — to confess his insubordination without reserve, and accept whatever penalty the Order might inflict! But she put her hand softly on his arm, and spoke so kindly, that evil desires and good resolutions were dispelled alike.

"Florian," said she, "you will help me to do right, I know. And I, too—I can be of some small aid even to you. You are happy here, I am sure."

"Happy!" he repeated, almost with a sob; and, half-conquering his enemy, half-giving-in, adopted at last that middle course, which runs so smooth and easy, like a tramway, down the broad road. "I am happy in so far as that, by remaining at Hamilton, I can hope to speed the interests of the true Church. You say that a priest should never mix himself with secular affairs. You little know how, in these evil days, our chief duties are connected with political intrigue —our very existence dependent on the energy we show as men of action and men of the world. Why am I here, Lady Hamilton, do you think? Is it to counsel you, as I used at the convent, and hold your gloves, and look in your face, and tie up your roses? It would be happy for me, indeed, if such were all my duties; for I could live and die, desiring no better. Alas! it is not so. My mission to England does not affect you. Its object is the aggrandisement of your husband."

"Not affect *me*!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands eagerly. "Oh, Florian! how can you say so? Tell me what it is, quick! I am dying to know. Is it a secret? Not now. Here he comes!"

Sir George may, perhaps, have heard these last words, as he ascended the terrace steps. Whether he heard them or not, he could scarce fail to mark his wife's excited gestures— her brightened eyes — her raised colour — and the sudden check in the conversation, caused by his own arrival. Again that dull pain seemed to gnaw at his heart, when he thought how bright and eager and amused she always seemed in Florian's company. He had seen the two on the terrace as he rode home across the park, and joined them by the

shortest way from the stable, without a tinge of that suspicion he might not be wanted, which was so painful now. Still he kept down all such unworthy feelings as he would have trampled an adder under his heavy riding-boots.

"Bring me a rose, Cerise," he said cheerily, as he passed his wife. "There are not many of them left now. Here, Florian," he added, tossing him a packet he held in his hand. "A note from pretty Alice at the Hamilton Arms. Have a care, man! there are a host of rivals in the field."

Florian looked at the writing on the cover, and turned pale. This might easily be accounted for, but why should Cerise, at the same instant, have blushed so red—redder even than the rose she was plucking for her husband?

Perhaps that was the question Sir George asked himself as he walked moodily into the house to dress.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE HAMILTON ARMS

LIKE many old country places of the time, Hamilton Hill had a village belonging to it, which seemed to have nestled itself into the valley under shelter of the great house, just near enough to reap the benefits of so august a neighbourhood, but at such a distance as not to infringe on the sacred precincts of the deer-park, or on the romantic privacy of the pleasure-grounds. Where there is a village there will be thirst, and thirst seems to be an Englishman's peculiar care and privilege; therefore, instead of slaking and quenching it at once by the use of water, he cherishes and keeps it alive, so to speak, with the judicious application of beer. A public-house is, accordingly, as necessary an adjunct to an English hamlet as an oven to a cookshop, a copper to a laundry, or a powder-magazine to a privateer.

The village of Nether-Hamilton possessed, then, one of these indispensable appendages; but, fortunately for the landlady, its inhabitants were obliged to ascend a steep hill, for the best part of a mile, before they could fill their cans with beer;—I say fortunately for the landlady, because such an exertion entailed an additional draught of this invigorating beverage to be consumed and paid for on the spot. The Hamilton Arms, for the convenience of posting, stood on the Great North Road, at least half a league, as the crow flies, from that abrupt termination of upland, the ridge of which was crowned by the towers and terraces of Hamilton Hill. Twice a week a heavy lumbering machine, drawn by six, and, in winter, often by eight horses, containing an infinity of passengers, stopped for a fresh relay at the Hamilton Arms; and when this ponderous vehicle had once been pulled up, it was not to be set going again without many readjustments, inquiries, oaths, protestations, and other incentives to delay.

The "Flying-Post" Coach, as it was ambitiously called, did not change horses in a minute and a half; a bare-armed helper at each animal to pull the rugs off, almost before the

driver had time to exchange glances with the barmaid, in days of which the speed, esteemed so wondrous then, was but a snail's crawl compared with our rate of travelling now. Nothing of the kind. The "Flying-Post" Coach was reduced to a deliberate walk long before it came in sight of its haven, where it stopped gradually, and in a succession of spasmodic jerks, like a musical-box running down. The coachman descended gravely from his perch, and the passengers, alighting one and all, roamed about the yard, or hovered round the inn door, as leisurely as if they had been going to spend the rest of the afternoon at the Hamilton Arms, and scarcely knew how to get rid of the spare time on their hands. Till numerous questions had been asked and answered — the weather, the state of the roads, and the last highway robbery discussed — packets delivered, luggage loaded or taken off, and refreshments of every kind consumed—there seemed to be no intention of proceeding with the journey. At length, during a lull in the chatter of many voices, one lumbering horse after another might be seen wandering round the gable-end of the building; two or three ostlers, looking and behaving like savages, fastened the broad buckles and clumsy straps of harness, in which rope and chainwork did as much duty as leather, and, after another pause of preparation, the passengers were summoned, the coachman tossed off what he called his "last toothful" of brandy and ascended solemnly to his place, gathering his reins with extreme caution, and imparting a scientific flourish to the thong of his heavy whip.

The inexperienced might have now supposed a start would be immediately effected. Not a bit of it. Out rushed a bare-armed landlady with streaming cap-ribbons—a rosy chamber-maid, all smiles and glances—a rough-headed pot-boy with a dirty apron—half a dozen more hangers-on of both sexes, each carrying something that had been forgotten—more oaths, more protestations, more discussions, and at least ten more minutes of the waning day unnecessarily wasted—then the coachman, bending forward, chirped and shouted—the poor sore-shouldered horses jerked, strained, and scrambled, plunging one by one at their collars, and leaning in heavily against the pole—the huge machine creaked, tottered, wavered, and finally jingled on at a promising pace enough, which, after about twenty yards, degenerated into the faintest apology for a trot. But the portly landlady looked after it nevertheless well pleased; for its freight had carried off a goodly quantity of fermented liquors, leaving in exchange

many welcome pieces of silver and copper to replenish the insatiable till.

Mrs. Dodge had but lately come to reside at the Hamilton Arms. Originally a plump comely lass, only daughter of a drunken old blacksmith at Nether-Hamilton, and inheriting what was termed in that frugal locality "a tidy bit of money," she was sought in marriage by a south-country pedlar, who visited her native village in the exercise of his calling, and whose silver tongue persuaded her to leave kith and kin and country for his sake. After many ups and downs in life, chiefly the result of her husband's rascality, she found herself established in a southern seaport, at a pot-house called the Fox and Fiddle, doing, as she expressed it, "a pretty business enough," in the way of crimping for the merchant service; and here, previous to the death of her husband, known by his familiars as "Butter-faced Bob," she made the acquaintance of Sir George Hamilton, then simple captain of the *Bashful Maid*, little dreaming she would ever become his tenant so near her old home.

Mrs. Dodge made lamentable outcries for her pedlar when she lost him; but there can be no question she was much better off after his death. He was dishonest, irritable, self-indulgent, harsh; and she had probably no better time of it at the Fox and Fiddle than is enjoyed by any other healthy, easy-tempered woman, whose husband cheats a good deal, drinks not a little, and is generally dissatisfied with his lot. He left her, however, a good round sum of money, such as placed her completely beyond fear of want; and after a decent term of mourning had expired, after she had received the condolences of her neighbours, besides two offers of marriage from publicans in adjoining streets, she took her niece home to live with her, sold off the goodwill of the Fox and Fiddle, wished her rejected suitors farewell, and sought the hamlet of her childhood, to sit down for life, as she said, in the bar of the Hamilton Arms. "It would be lonesome, no doubt," she sometimes observed, "without Alice; and if ever Alice took and left her, as leave her she might for a home of her own any day, being a good girl and a comely, why then;" and here Mrs. Dodge would simper and look conscious, bristling her fat neck till her little round chin disappeared in its folds, and inferring thereby that, in the event of such a contingency, she might be induced to make one of her customers happy, by consenting to embark on another matrimonial venture before she had done with the institution for good and all. Nor, though Mrs. Dodge was

fifty years of age, and weighed fifteen stone, would she have experienced any difficulty in finding a second husband, save, perhaps, the pleasing embarrassment of selection from the multitude at her command. And if her aunt could thus have "lovyers," as she said, "for the looking at 'em," it may be supposed that pretty Alice found no lack of admirers in a house-of-call so well frequented as the Hamilton Arms. Pretty Alice, with her pale brow, her hazel eyes, her sweet smile, and soft gentle manners, that made sad havoc in the hearts of the young graziers, cattle-dealers, and other travellers that came under their comforting influence off the wild inhospitable moor. Even Captain Bold, the red-nosed "blood," as such persons were then denominated, whose calling nobody knew or dared ask him, but who was conspicuous for his flowing wig, laced coat, and wicked bay mare, would swear, with fearfully ingenious oaths, that Alice was prettier than any lady in St. James's; and if she would but say the word, why, burn him—blight him—sink him into the lowest depths of Hamilton Mere—if he, John Bold, wouldn't consent to throw up his profession, have his comb cut, and subside at once into a homely, helpless, henpecked, barndoor fowl.

But Alice would not say the word, neither to Captain Bold nor to any honester man. She had been true to her sailor-love, through a long weary time of anxiety, and now she had her reward. Slap-Jack was domiciled within a mile of her, by one of those unforeseen strokes of fortune which he called a "circumstance," and Alice thanked Heaven on her knees day and night for the happiness of her lot.

It may be supposed that her sweetheart spent much of his leisure at the Hamilton Arms. Though he got through half the work of Sir George's household, for the foretop-man never could bear to be idle, his occupations did not seem so engrossing as to prevent a daily visit to Alice. It was on one of these occasions that, gossiping with Mrs. Dodge, as was his wont, he observed a gold cross heaving on her expansive bosom, and taxed her with a favoured lover and a speedy union forthwith.

"Go along with you," wheezed the jolly landlady, in no way offended by the accusation. "It's our new lodger as gave me this trinket only yesterday. Lovyers! says you. 'Marry!' as my poor Bob used to say, '*his* head is not made of the wood they cut blocks from;' an' let me tell you, Master Slap-Jack, a man's never so near akin to a fool as when he's a-courting. Put that in your pipe, my lad, and smoke it. Why, Alice,

my poppet, how you blush! Well, as I was a-sayin', this is a nice civil gentleman, and a well spoken. Takes his bottle with his dinner, and, mind ye, he will have it o' the best. None of your ranting, random, come-by-chance roysterers, like Captain Bold, who'll sing as many songs and tell as many — well, *lies* I call 'em, honest gentleman — over a rummer of punch, as would serve most of my customers two gallons of claret and a stoup of brandy to finish up with."

"There's not much pith in that Captain Bold," interposed Slap-Jack contemptuously. "You put a strain on him, and see if he don't start somewhere. Captain, indeed! It's a queer ship's company where they made *him* skipper, askin' your pardon, Mrs. Dodge."

Slap-Jack had on one occasion interrupted the captain in a warmer declaration to his sweetheart than he quite relished, and hated him honestly enough in consequence.

"Hoity-toity!" laughed the landlady. "The captain's nothing to me. I never could abide your black men; and I don't know that they're a bit better set off by wearing a red nose. The captain's Alice's admirer, not mine; and I think Alice likes him a bit too sometimes, I do!"

This was said, as the French express it, "with intention." It made Alice toss her head; but Slap-Jack only winked.

"I know better," said he. "Alice always was heart-of-oak; as true as the compass; wasn't you, my lass? See how she hoists her colours if you do but hail her. No, no, aunt Dodge—for aunt you'll be to me afore another year is out—it's your broad bows and buxom figure-head as brings the customers cruising about this here bar, like flies round a honey-pot. Come, let's have the rights now of your gold cross. Is it a keepsake, or a charm, or a love-token, or what?"

"Love-token!" repeated Mrs. Dodge, in high glee. "What do you know of love-tokens? Got a wisp of that silly girl's brown hair, maybe, and a broken sixpence done up in a rag of canvas all stained with sea-water! Why, when my poor Bob was a-courtin' me, the first keepsake as ever he gave me was eighteen yards of black satin, all off of the same piece, and two real silver bodkins for my hair, as thick a'most as that kitchen poker. Ay, lass! it was something like keeping company in my day to have a pedlar for a bachelor. Well, well; our poor sailor lad maybe is as good as here and there a one after all. Who knows?"

"Good enough for me, aunt," whispered Alice, looking shyly up at her lover from the dish she was wiping, ere she put it carefully on the shelf.

Mrs. Dodge laughed again.

"There's as good fish in the sea, Alice, as ever came out of it; and a maid may take her word back again, ay, at the church door, if she has a mind. The foreign gentleman in the blue room, him as gave me this little cross, he says to me only yesterday morning, 'Madame,' says he, as polite as you please, 'no man was ever yet deceived by a woman if he trusted her entirely. I repose entire confidence in madame'—that was me, Alice; 'her face denotes good manners, a good heart, a good life.' Perhaps he meant good living; but that's what he said. 'I am going to ask madame to charge herself with an important trust for me, because I rely securely on her integrity.' Oh! he spoke beautiful, I can tell you. 'In case of my absence,' says he, 'from your respectable apartments, I will confide to you a sealed packet, to be delivered to a young man who will call for it at a certain hour on a certain day that I shall indicate before I leave. If the young man does not appear, I can trust madame to commit this packet to the flames.' He was fool enough to add," simpered Mrs. Dodge, looking a little conscious, "'that it was rare to see so much discretion joined to so much beauty,' or some such gammon; but of course I made no account of that."

"If he paid out his palaver so handsome," observed Slap-Jack, "take my word for it the chap's a papist."

But Mrs. Dodge would not hear of such a construction being put on her lodger's gallantry.

"Papist!" she repeated angrily; "no more a papist than you are! Why, I sent him up a slice o' powdered beef was last Friday, with a bit of garnishing, parsnips, and what not, and he eats it up every scrap, and asks for another plateful. Papist! says you! and what if he were? I tell you if he was the Pope o' Rome, come to live respectable on my first floor, he's a sight more to my mind for a lodger than his friend the captain! Papists, indeed! If I wanted to lay my hand on a papist, I needn't to travel far for to seek one. Though, I will say, my lady's liker a hangel nor a Frenchwoman, and if all the papists was made up to her pattern, why, for my part, I'd up and cry 'Bless the Pope!' with the rankest on 'em all!"

It was obvious that this northern district took no especial credit to itself for the bigotry of its Protestantism, and Mrs. Dodge, though a staunch member enough of the reformed religion, allowed no scruples of conscience to interfere with the gains of her hostelry, nor perhaps entertained any less kindly sentiments towards the persecuted members of the Church of Rome, that they formed some of her best customers,

paying handsomely for the privacy of their apartments, while they ate and drank of the choicest during their seclusion. But this unacknowledged partiality was a bone of contention between his sweetheart's aunt and Slap-Jack, who prided himself especially on being what he termed True-Blue, holding in great abhorrence everything connected with Rome, St. Germains, and the Jacobite party. He allowed of no saints in the calendar except Lady Hamilton, whom he excepted from his denunciations by some reasoning process of his own which it is needless to follow out. Nevertheless Alice knew right well that such an argument as now seemed imminent was the sure forerunner of a storm.

"Aunt," said she softly, "I've looked out all the table linen, and done my washing-up till supper-time. If you want nothing particular, I'll run out and get a breath of fresh air off the moor before it gets dark."

"And it's time for me to be off, aunt Dodge!" exclaimed Slap-Jack, as Alice knew full well he would. "Bless ye, we shall beat to quarters at the Hill now in less than half an hour, and being a warrant-officer, as you may say, o' course it's for me to set a good example to the ship's company. Fare ye well, Mrs. Dodge, and give the priest a wide berth, if he comes alongside, though I'll never believe as you've turned papist, until I see you barefoot at the church door, in a white sheet with a candle in your hand!"

With this parting shot, Slap-Jack seized his hat and ran out, leaving Mrs. Dodge to smile blandly over the fire, fingering her gold cross, and thinking drowsily, now of her clean sanded floor, now of her bright dishes and gaudy array of crockery, now of her own comely person and the agreeable manners of her lodger overhead.

Meanwhile it is scarcely necessary to say, that although Slap-Jack had expressed such haste to depart, he lingered in the cold wind off the moor not far from the house door, till he saw Alice emerge for the mouthful of fresh air that was so indispensable, but against which she fortified herself with a checked woollen shawl, which she muffled in a manner he thought very becoming, round her pretty head. Neither need I describe the start of astonishment with which she acknowledged the presence of her lover, as if he was the very last person she expected to meet; nor the assumed reluctance of her consent to accompany him a short distance on his homeward way; nor even the astonishment she expressed at his presumption in adjusting her muffler more comfortably, and exacting for his assistance the payment that

is often so willingly granted while it is so vehemently refused. These little manœuvres had been rehearsed very often of late, but had not yet begun to pall in the slightest degree. The lovers had long ago arrived at that agreeable phase of courtship, when the reserve of an agitating and uncertain preference has given way to the confidence of avowed affection. They had a thousand things to talk about, and they talked about them very close together, perhaps because the wind swept bleak and chill over the moor in the gathering twilight. It was warmer no doubt, and certainly pleasanter, thus to carry two faces under one hood.

It is impossible to overhear the conversation of people in such close juxtaposition, nor is it usually, we believe, worth much trouble on the part of an eavesdropper. I imagine it consists chiefly of simple, not to say idiotic remarks, couched in corresponding language, little more intelligible to rational persons than that with which a nurse endeavours to amuse a baby, whose demeanour, by the way, generally seems to express a dignified contempt for the efforts of its attendant. When we consider the extravagances of speech by which we convey our strongest sentiments, we need not be surprised at the follies of which we are guilty in their indulgence. When we recall the absurdities with which an infant's earliest ideas of conversation must be connected, can we wonder what fools people grow up in after life?

It was nearly dark when they parted, and a clear streak of light still lingered over the edge of the moor. Alice indeed would have gone farther, but Slap-Jack had his own ideas as to his pretty sweetheart being abroad so late, and the chance of an escort home, from Captain Bold returning not quite sober on the wicked bay mare; so he clasped her tenderly in his arms, receiving at the same time a hearty kiss given ungrudgingly and with goodwill, ere she fleeted away like a phantom, while he stood watching till the last flutter of her dress disappeared through the gloom. Then he, too, turned unwillingly homeward, with a prayer for the woman he loved on his lips.

If Alice looked round, it was under the corner of her muffler, and she sped back to her gleaming saucepans, her white dishes, and the warm glow of her aunt's kitchen, with a step as light as her happy maiden heart. But there were only two ways of re-entering the Hamilton Arms—up a gravel-walk that led straight to the front door across a washing green, separated from the highroad by a thick close-cut hedge, or through the stable-yard and back entrance

into the scullery. This last ingress was effectually closed for the present by the arrival of Captain Bold, rather more drunk than common, swearing strings of new and fashionable oaths, while he consigned his wicked bay mare to the charge of the admiring ostler. Alice heard his reckless treble screaming above the hoarse notes of the stableman before she turned the corner of the house, and shrank back to enter at the other door. But here, also, much to her dismay, she found her retreat cut off. Two gentlemen were pacing up and down the gravel-path in earnest conversation. One of them, even in the dusk, she recognised as the inmate of their blue room, who had given her aunt the gold cross. The other was a younger, taller, and slimmer man than his companion. Both were dressed in dark plain garments, gesticulating much while they spoke, and seemed deeply engrossed with the subject under discussion. Foolish Alice might well have run past unnoticed, and taken shelter at once in the house, but the girl had some shy feeling as to her late tryst with her sweetheart, and shrank perhaps from the good-humoured banter of the elder man, whose quiet sarcastic smile she had already learned to dread. So she stopped short, and cowered down with a beating heart under shelter of the hedge, thinking to elude them as they turned in their walk, and glide by unobserved into the porch.

They talked with such vehemence, that had they been Englishmen she would have thought they were quarrelling. Their arms waved, their hands worked, their voices rose and fell. The elder man was the principal speaker, and seemed to be urging something with considerable vehemence to which the other was disinclined; but none of his arguments, pointedly as they were put, arrested Alice's attention so much as two proper names muttered in a tone of deprecation by his companion. These were "Lady Hamilton" and "Slap-Jack." Of the first she was almost sure, in the latter she could not be mistaken!

Her experience on a southern seaboard, to which many smugglers from the opposite coast resorted, had taught Alice to understand the French language far better than she could speak it. With her ears sharpened and her faculties roused, by the mention of her lover's name, she cowered down in her hiding-place, and listened, rapt, fearful, attentive, like a hare with the beagles on its track.

CHAPTER XLVIII

PRESSURE

"DO you suppose I came here to amuse myself?" asked Malletort, passing his arm under his companion's so as to turn him round on the gravel-walk within a yard of Alice's hiding-place. "Do you think it is agreeable to reside in a pot-house where eggs and bacon form the *ne plus ultra* of cookery, and if a man cannot drink sour claret he must be satisfied with muddy ale? Every one of us has to sacrifice his own identity, has to consecrate himself entirely to such an effort as ours. Look at me, Florian, and ask yourself, was I born for such a life as this, to vegetate by the wayside in the dullest province of the dullest country in Europe—my only society, that awful landlady, my only excitement, the daily fear of a blunder from that puzzle-headed brigand who calls himself Captain Bold, and whom I can hang at any moment I please, or I would not trust him five yards from my side. If I should be discovered, and unable to get out of the way in time, why it might go very hard with me, but even against this contingency I have provided. You would find all the directions you need drawn out in our own cipher, and consigned to my respectable hostess. I have left the money for her weekly account sealed up and addressed to Mrs. Dodge on my chimneypiece, also the day and hour of your visit, as we have agreed. If we *both* fall into difficulties, which is most improbable, the packet will be burned, for I can trust the woman, I believe, and with so much the more confidence, that I doubt if anyone on this side the Channel has the key to our cipher. So far, you observe, I have provided for all contingencies; and now, my good Florian, what have *you* done? You tell me you have failed with his confidential servant."

"What, Slap-Jack!" answered Florian, and the name brought Alice's heart to her mouth as the two priests again approached her hiding-place. "Impossible! I tell you he is as true as steel. Why, he sailed with us in the brigantine.

We were all like brothers. Ah, Malletort, you cannot understand these things!"

"I can understand any scruple, any superstition, any weakness of humanity, for I see examples every day," replied the abbé, "but I cannot and will not understand that such imaginary obstacles are insurmountable. Bah! You have *carte blanche* in promises, you have even a round sum to draw upon in hard cash. Will you tell me that man's honesty or woman's virtue is not to be bought if you bid high enough? The whole business is simply a game of *bouillote*. Not the best card, nor even the deepest purse, but the boldest player sweeps the stakes. Florian, I fear you have done but little in all these long weeks; that was why, at great risk, I sent you a note, begging an interview, that I might urge on you the importance of despatch."

"It was a risk," observed Florian. "The note was brought by Sir George himself."

Malletort laughed.

"He carried his fate without knowing it," commented the abbé. "After all, it is the destiny of mankind. Every one of us bears about with him the germ of that which shall some day prove his destruction. I don't know that one's step is the heavier till palsy has begun to tingle, or one's appetite the worse till digestion already fails. Come, Florian, the plot is nearly ripe now, and there is little more time to lose. We must have Sir George in it up to his neck. He carries this district with him, and I am then sure of all the country north of the Trent. You have impressed on him, I trust, that it is an earldom to begin with, if we win?"

"And if we lose?" asked the other wistfully.

Malletort smacked his tongue against the roof of his mouth, making, at the same time, a significant gesture with his hand under his ear.

"A leap from a ladder would finish it," he remarked abruptly. "For that matter we are all in the same boat. If a plank starts, it is simply, *Bon soir la compagnie!*"

Florian could control himself no longer.

"Are you a man?" he burst out. "A man? Are you anything less devilish than the arch-fiend himself, to bid me take part in such a scheme? And what a part! To lure my only friend, my comrade, whose bread has fed me in want, whose hand has kept me in danger, down, down, step by step, to crime, ruin, and a shameful death. What am I? What have I done, that you should ask me to join in such a plot as this?"

"What you are, is a novice of the Society of Jesus," answered Malletort coldly, "degraded to that rank for what you have done, which I need hardly remind you. Florian, it is well that you have to deal with me, who am a man of the world no less than a priest, instead of some stern provincial who would report your disobedience to the Order, even before he referred you to its statutes. Look your task firmly in the face. What is it? To make your friend, the man for whom you profess this ludicrous attachment, one of the first subjects in England. To raise his charming wife — they tell me she has grown more charming than ever—to a station for which she is eminently fitted; and all this at a certain risk of course, but what risk?—that the best organised movement Europe has seen for a hundred years, should fail at the moment of success, and that Sir George should be selected for a victim, amongst a score of names nobler, richer, more obnoxious to the Government than his own. And even then. If worst came to worst, what would be Lady Hamilton's position? An heiress in her own right, a widow further enriched by marriage, beautiful, unencumbered, and free. I cannot see why you should hesitate a moment."

Florian groaned.

"Have mercy on me!" he muttered hoarsely, wringing his hands in despair. "Can you not spare me this one trial, remit this one penance? Send me anywhere — Tartary, Morocco, Japan. Let me starve in a desert, pine in a dungeon, suffer martyrdom at the stake; anything but this, and I submit myself cheerfully, willingly, nay, thankfully. Malletort, you *must* have a human heart. You are talented, respected, powerful. You have influence with the Order. You have known me since I was a boy. For the love of Heaven have pity on me, and spare me this!"

The abbé was not one of those abnormal specimens of humanity who take pleasure in the sufferings of their fellow-creatures. It could not be said of him that his heart was cruel or malicious. He had simply no heart at all. But it was a peculiarity he shared with many governing spirits, that he grew cooler and cooler in proportion to the agitation with which he came in contact. He took a pinch of snuff, pausing for the refreshment of a sneeze before he replied—

"And with the next report I furnish to the Order send in your refusal to obey? Your refusal, Florian; you know what that means? Well, be it so. The promotion to a coadjutor's rank is revoked, the former novice is recalled, and

returns to St. Omer at once, where I will not enlarge on his reception. Riding post to the seaboard he meets another traveller, young, handsome, well provided, and unscrupulous, hurrying northward on a mission which seems to afford him considerable satisfaction. It is Brother Jerome, we will say, or Brother Boniface; the one known in the world as Beauty Adolphe of the King's Musketeers, the other as Count Victor de Rosny, whose boast it is that love and credit are universally forced on him, though he has never paid a tradesman nor kept faith with a woman in his life. Either of these would be an agreeable addition to the family party up there on the hill. Either would labour hard to obtain influence over Sir George, and do his best or worst to be agreeable to Lady Hamilton. Shall I forward your refusal by to-morrow's courier, Florian, or will you think better of it, and at least take a night to consider the subject in all its bearings?"

Florian pondered, passed his hand across his brow, and looked wildly in his adviser's face.

"Not a moment!" said he, "not a moment! I was wrong —I was impatient—I was a fool—I was wicked, *mea culpa! mea culpa!* What am I that I should oppose the will of the Order—that I should hesitate in anything they think fit to command? What is a Jesuit priest—what is anyone, after all, but a leaf blown before the wind—a bubble floating down the stream? There is no free agency—Destiny rules the game. The Moslem is not far wrong when he refuses to stir out of the destroyer's way, and says 'It is ordained!' I am wiser now—I seem to have woke up from a dream. What is it you would have me do? Am I to put poison in his wine, or cut Sir George's throat to-night when he is asleep? You have only to say the word—are you not my superior? Am I not a Jesuit? I must obey!"

Alice, still crouching behind the close-cut hedge, might well be alarmed at the scraps she overheard of such a dialogue as this. Malletort, on the contrary, watched his junior with the well-satisfied air of a cook who perceives the dish on which his skill is concentrated bubbling satisfactorily towards perfection. He allowed the young man's emotion to exhaust itself ere he plied him again with argument, and knowing that all strong feelings have their ebb and flow like the tide, trusted to find him more malleable than ever after his late outbreak.

It was difficult to explain to Florian that his superiors desired him to make love to Lady Hamilton, in order that he might bring her husband into their hands; and the task

was only rendered the more delicate by the young Jesuit's hopeless yet sincere attachment to his hostess—an attachment which had in it the germ of ruin or salvation according to his own powers of self-control—such an attachment as the good call a trial and the weak a fatality. At times the abbé almost wished he had selected some less scrupulous novice for the execution of this critical manœuvre—one like Brother Jerome or Brother Boniface, who would have disposed himself to it with all the relish and goodwill of those who resume a favourite occupation which circumstances have obliged them, for a time, to forego. Such tools would have been easier to manipulate; but perhaps, he reflected, their execution would not be so effectual and complete. The steel was dangerously flexible and elastic, but then it was of the truest and finest temper forged. He flattered himself it was now in the hands of a workman.

"Let us talk matters over like men of the world, my dear Florian," said the abbé, after they had made two turns of the walk in silence, approaching within a foot of Alice while he spoke. "We are neither of us boys, but men playing a game at *bouillote — ombre — picquet* — what you will, and holding nearly all the winning cards in our hands. You are willing, I think, to believe I am your friend?"

Florian shuddered, but nodded assent.

"Well, then, as friends," continued the abbé, "let there be no concealment between us. I have already gone over the details of our programme. I need not recapitulate the plan of the campaign, nor, to a man of intelligence like yourself, need I insist on the obvious certainty of success. All dispositions of troops and such minor matters are left to our commanders, and they number some of the first soldiers of the age. With such affairs we need not meddle. Intellect confines itself to intrigue, and leaves hard knocks to the hard-fisted, hard-headed fools whose business it is to give and take them. I have been busy since I came here—busier almost than you could believe. I have made acquaintance with ——, and ——, and ——."

Here the abbé sank his voice to a cautious whisper, so that Alice, straining her ears to listen, could not catch the names he enumerated.

"Although they seemed lukewarm at first, and are esteemed loyal subjects of King George, they are ripe for a restoration now. By the bye, with these people never forget to call it a Restoration. Nothing affects an Englishman so strongly as a phrase, if it be old enough. I have seen a red-

nosed squire of to-day fidget uneasily in his chair, and get quite hot and angry if you mentioned the Warrant of the Parliament; call it the law of the land, and he submits without a murmur. They eat beef, these islanders, and they drink ale, muddy ale, so thick, my dear Florian, you might cut it with a knife. Perhaps that is what makes them so stupid. It is hard work to drive an idea into their heads; but when once there, it must be admitted, you cannot eradicate it. If they are the most obstinate of opponents, they are also the staunchest of partisans. Well, I have a score of their names here in my pocket—men who have pledged themselves to go through with us, even if it comes to cold steel, sequestration —ay, hanging for high treason! Not a man of them will flinch. I can undertake to say so much; and this, you observe, my dear Florian, would greatly facilitate *our* escape in the event of a failure. But in the entire list I have none fit to be a leader—none whose experience would warrant him in taking command of the others, or whose adventurous spirit would urge him to assume such authority. Sir George Hamilton is the very man I require. He is bold, reckless, ambitious, not entirely without brains, and has been a soldier of France. Florian, we *must* have him at the head of the movement. It is your duty to put him there."

Florian bowed submissively.

"I can only persuade," said he; "but you do not know your man as well as I do. Nothing will induce Sir George so much as to have a horse saddled until he can see for himself that there is a reasonable prospect of success. I have heard him say a hundred times, 'Never show your teeth till your guns are shotted;' and he has acted up to his maxim, ever since I have known him, in all the relations of life. It is, perhaps, presumptuous in me to advise one of your experience and abilities, but I warn you to be careful in this instance. On every account I am most anxious that our undertaking should not miscarry. I am pledged to you myself, but, believe me, I must have something more than empty assurances to enlist my friend."

"Quite right," answered the other, slapping him cheerfully on the shoulder; "quite right. A man who goes blindly into these matters seldom sees his way very clearly afterwards. But what would your friend have? We possess all the material of success, only waiting to be set in motion; and this I can prove to him in black and white. We have men, arms, artillery, ammunition, and money. This insurrection shall not fail, like some of its predecessors, for lack of the

grease that keeps all human machinery in motion. A hundred thousand louis are ready at an hour's notice, and another hundred thousand every week till the new coinage of James the Third is issued from the mint. Here, in the next province, in Lancashire, where the sun never shines, every *seigneur*—squire—what are they called?—has mounted his dependants, grooms, falconers, huntsmen, tenants—all horsemen of the first force. Five thousand cavalry will be in the saddle at twenty-four hours' notice. Several battalions of Irish soldiers, brave and well-disciplined as our own, are assembled on the coast of Normandy, waiting only the signal to embark. Our infantry have shoes and clothes; our cavalry are provided with farriers and accoutrements; our artillery, on *this* occasion, not without draught-horses and harness. Come to me to-morrow afternoon, and I will furnish you with a written statement of our resources for Sir George's information. And, Florian, you believe honestly that he might be tempted to join us?"

The other was revolving a thousand probabilities in his mind.

"I will do my best," he answered absently.

"Then I will risk it," replied Malletort. "You shall also have a list of the principal noblemen and gentlemen who have given in their adhesion to their rightful sovereign. I have upstairs a manifesto, to which these loyal cavaliers have attached their signatures. I never trust a man by halves, Florian, just as I never trust a woman at all. Nothing venture, nothing have. That paper would hang us all, no doubt; but I will confide it to you and take the risk. Yours shall be the credit of persuading Sir George to subscribe to it in his own hand."

Florian assented, with a nod. Too much depressed to speak, he felt like some poor beast driven to the shambles, blundering on, dogged and stupefied, to its fate. Malletort's keen perceptions detected this despondency, and he endeavoured to cheer him up.

"At the new Court," said he, "we shall probably behold our retired musketeer commanding the Guards of his Sovereign, and carrying his gold baton on the steps of the throne. A peer, a favourite, a Councillor of State — what you will. His beautiful wife the admired and envied of the three kingdoms. They will owe their rank, their grandeur, their all, to Florian de St. Croix. Will not he—will not she be grateful? And Florian de St. Croix shall choose his own reward. Nothing the Church can offer will be esteemed too

precious for such a servant. I am disinterested for once, since I shall return to France. In England, a man may exist; were it not for the climate he might even vegetate; but it is only in Paris that he can be said to live. Florian, it is a glorious prospect, and the road to fortune lies straight before us."

"Through an enemy's country," replied the other gravely. "Nothing shall persuade me but that the mass of the people are staunch to the Government."

"The mass of the people!" repeated Malletort contemptuously; "the mass of the people neither make revolutions nor oppose them. In point of fact they are the women and children who sit quietly at home. It is the highest and the lowest who are the discontented classes, and if you set these in motion, the one to lead in front, the other to push behind, why, the mass of the people, as you call them, may be driven whichever way you please, like a flock of sheep into a pen. Listen to those peasants singing over their liquor, and tell me if their barbarian ditties do not teach you which way the tide of feeling acts at present amongst the rabble?"

They stopped in their walk, and through the open window of the tap-room could hear Captain Bold's treble quavering out a Jacobite ballad of the day, no less popular than nonsensical, as was attested by the stentorian chorus and wild jingling of glasses that accompanied it.

"We are done with sodden kale,
Are we not? Are we not?
We are done with sodden kale,
Are we not?
And the reptile in his mail,
Though he tore with tooth and nail,
We have got him by the tail,
Have we not?

We will bring the Stuart back,
Will we not? Will we not?
We will bring the Stuart back,
Will we not?
With a whip to curl and crack
Round the Hanoverian pack,
And 'twill lend King George a smack,
Will it not?

We are done with rebel rigs,
Are we not? Are we not?
We are done with rebel rigs,
Are we not?

We will teach them 'Please the pigs!'
English tunes for foreign jigs,
And the devil take the Whigs!
Will he not? Will he not?
And the devil take the Whigs!
Will he not?"

While the priests were thus occupied, Alice, darting past them unobserved, took refuge in the house.

CHAPTER XLIX

POOR EMERALD

OF all passions that tear and worry at the human heart, jealousy seems to be not only the most painful but the most contradictory. Anger, desire, avarice, revenge, all these propose to themselves a certain end, in the accomplishment of which there is doubtless an evil satisfaction for the moment, however closely remorse may tread on the heels of indulgence, but jealousy, conscious only of its own bitterness, knows not even what to hope or what to fear. It hates itself, though its torture is purely selfish; it hates another whom all the while it madly loves. It is proud, yet stoops to meanness—cruel, yet quivers with the pain it inflicts, desperate while cowardly, pitiless though sensitive, obstinate and unstable, a mass of incongruities, and a purgatory from which there is neither present purification nor prospective escape.

It may please a woman to feel that she can make her lover jealous, it may even please her, in her feminine relish for dominion, to mark the painful effect of her power; but if it were possible to love and be wise, he would know that he had better hold his hand in the fire without wincing, than let her discover the force of the engine with which she can thus place him on the rack. Some women are generous enough not to inflict a torture so readily at command, but even these take credit for their forbearance, and assume, in consequence, a position of authority, which is sometimes fatal to the male interest in such a partnership. The sweetest kisses to a woman are those she gives on tiptoe. A man—at least such a one as is best worth winning—cares for a woman because she loves him. A woman, I imagine, is never so devoted as when she feels there is yet something more to be gained of that dominion at which she is always striving, but which she

is apt to undervalue when attained. Now, if she has taken it into her head to make her lover jealous, and finds his equanimity utterly undisturbed, the result is a mortifying and irremediable defeat to the aggressive Amazon. She has hazarded a large stake and won nothing. Worse than this, she is led to suspect the stability of her empire, and sees it (because women always jump to conclusions) slipping like ice out of her grasp. Besides, she has put herself in the wrong, as after a burst of tears and a storm of unfounded reproaches, she will herself acknowledge; and the probable result of her operations will be a penitent and unqualified submission. Let the conqueror be high-minded enough to abstain from ever casting this little vagary in her teeth, and he will have reason to congratulate himself on his own self-command for the rest of the alliance.

But if the indulgence of jealousy be thus impolitic in a lover, it is not only an unworthy weakness, but a fatal mistake on the part of a husband. The doubts and fears, the uncertainties and anxieties, that are only ludicrous in the outer courts of Cupid, become contemptible at the fire-side of Hymen, derogatory to the man's dignity, and insulting to the woman's faith. There are few individuals of either sex, even amongst the worst natures, but can be safely trusted, if only the trust be complete and unqualified. It is the little needless reservation, the suspicion rather inferred than expressed, that leads to breach of confidence and deceit. With ninety-nine women out of every hundred, the very fact of possessing full and unquestioned freedom constitutes the strongest possible restraint from its abuse. To suspect a wife, is to kindle a spark of fire that eats into, and scorches, and consumes the whole comfort of home; to let her know she is suspected, is to blow that spark into a conflagration which soon reduces the whole domestic edifice to ruins.

There are some noble natures, however, that unite with generosity of sentiment, keen perceptive faculties, and a habit of vigilance bordering on suspicion. These cannot but suffer under the possibility of betrayal, the more so that they despise themselves for a weakness which yet they have not power to shake off. They stifle the flame indeed, and it burns them all the deeper to the quick—they scorn to cry out, to groan, even to remonstrate, but the sternest and bravest cannot repress the quiverings of the flesh under the branding-iron, and perhaps she, of all others, from whom it would be wise to conceal the injury, is the first to find it out. Wounded affections chafe in silence on one side, insulted

pride scowls and holds aloof on the other; the evil festers, the sore spreads, the breach widens, the gloom gathers; it is well if some heavy blow falls to bring the sufferers to their senses, if some grand explosion takes place to clear the conjugal atmosphere, and establish a footing of mutual confidence once more.

Cerise could hardly keep her tears back when Sir George, passing hastily through the hall, booted as usual for the saddle, would stop to address her in a few commonplace words of courtesy, with as much deference, she told herself bitterly, as if she had been an acquaintance of yesterday. There were no more little foolish familiarities, no more affected chidings, betraying in their childish absurdities the overflowing of happy affection, no more silly jests of which only themselves knew the import. It was all grave politeness and ceremonious kindness now. It irritated, it maddened her—the harshest usage had been less distressing. If he would only speak cruel words! If he would only give her an excuse to complain! She could not guess how this change had been caused, or if she did guess, she was exceedingly careful not to analyse her suppositions; but she hunted her husband about wistfully, looking penitent without a fault, guilty without a crime, longing timidly for an explanation which yet she had not courage to demand.

The room at Hamilton in which Sir George spent his mornings on those rare occasions when he remained indoors, was, it is needless to observe, the gloomiest and most uncomfortable apartment in the house. Its furniture consisted chiefly of guns, fishing-rods, and jack-boots. It was generally very untidy, and contained for its only ornaments a model of the brigantine and a sketch in crayons of his wife. Whenever Sir George thought he had anything very particular to do, it was his habit to retire here and barricade himself in. The morning after Florian's interview with Malletort, Cerise took up her post at the door of this stronghold, with a vague hope that chance might afford an opportunity for the explanation she desired.

"If he is really angry," thought poor Cerise, "and I am sure he must be, perhaps he will have taken my picture down, and I can ask him why, and he will scold me, and I shall put my arms round his neck, and he cannot help forgiving me then! Nobody else would be so unkind without a reason. And yet he is not unkind; I wish he were; and I wish, too, I had courage to speak out! Ah! it would be so much easier if I did not care for him!"

Lady Hamilton's hands were very cold while she stood at the door. After waiting at least five minutes she took courage, gave a timid little knock, and went in. Nothing in the aspect of the apartment or its inmate afforded the opportunity she desired. Sir George, tranquilly engaged with a pair of compasses and a foot-rule, was whistling softly over a plan of his estates. Her own picture hung in its usual place. Glancing at it, she wondered whether she had ever been so pretty, and if so, how he could have got tired of her already. His calmness, too, was in irritating contrast to her own agitation. Altogether she did not feel half so meek as on the other side of the door.

He looked up from his employment, and rose.

"What is it, my lady?" he asked, pushing the implements aside. "Can I be of any service to you before I get on my horse? Emerald is at this moment saddled and waiting for me."

The tone was good-humoured enough, but cool and unconcerned as if he had been speaking to his grandmother. Besides, scarcely yet more than a bride, and to be called *my lady!* It was unbearable!

"If you are in such a hurry," she answered angrily, "I will not detain you. What I had to say was of no importance, and probably would not in the least interest you. I am sorry I came in."

"Not at all," he replied, in the same matter-of-course voice. "When I am at leisure I am always glad of your society. Just now, I fear, I cannot take advantage of it. I must be absent all the morning, but St. Croix is, doubtless, at home, and will keep you company."

Guarded as was his tone, either her woman's ear detected a false note in the mention of Florian's name, whom he seldom spoke of so ceremoniously, or her woman's intuition taught her to suspect the true grievance. At anyrate, she persuaded herself she ought to be more displeased than she really felt. It would have been only right to show it. Now was the time to get upon her high horse, and she would have mounted at once, but that her blushes would not be kept down. It was too provoking! What must her husband think of them? She could have burst out crying, but that would be infinitely worse. She turned away, therefore, and assuming all the dignity she could muster, walked off to her own apartment without another word.

Sir George did not follow. Had he done so, it might have altered his whole morning's employment, to see his

young wife fling herself down on her knees at the bedside, and weep as if her heart would break. No, he flung himself into the saddle, and in five minutes was alone with Emerald on the moor.

I wonder what the good horse thought of his rider, when he felt his head steadied by the strong familiar hand, the well-known limbs grasping his sides with pliant energy, the caressing voice whispering its cheering words of caution and encouragement? Did he know that his master urged him to his speed because the care that is proverbially said to sit behind the horseman cannot keep her seat on a fine goer, in good condition, when fairly in his swing? Did he know that while that smooth, powerful stride, regular and untiring as machinery, swept furlong by furlong over the elastic surface of the moor, she must be left panting behind, to come up indeed at the first check, rancorous and vindictive as ever, but still beaten by a horse's length at least so long as the excitement of the gallop lasted and the extreme pace could hold?

Emerald enjoyed it as much as his master. When pulled up, he stopped unwillingly, his whole frame glowing with health and energy, his eye glancing, his ear alert, his broad red nostril drinking in the free moorland air like a cordial, and his bit ringing cheerfully, while he tossed his head in acknowledgment of the well-earned caress that smoothed the warm supple skin on his swelling neck.

The horse seemed a little puzzled too, looking round in vain for his friends the hounds, as if he wondered why he had been brought thus merrily over the moor, good fun as it was, without any further object than the ride. In this matter there was little sympathy between man and horse. Sir George was thinking neither of hounds, nor hawks, nor any other accessories of the chase. He neither marked the secluded pool in which he had set up the finest stag of the season at bay last month, nor the ledge of rocks into which he ran his fox to ground last week. He was far back in the past. He was a young musketeer again, with neither rank, nor wealth, nor broad acres, but with that limitless reversion of the future which was worth all his possessions ten times told. Yet even thus looking back to his earliest manhood, he could not shake himself free from the memory of Cerise. Ever since he could remember, that gentle face and those blue eyes had softened his waking thoughts and haunted him in his dreams; there was no period in his life at which she had not been the ideal of his imagination, the prize he

desired. Even if he had not married her, he thought with a groan, he would still be cursed with this gnawing, festering pain that drove him out here into the wilderness for the mere bodily relief of incessant action. If he had not married her! Another thought stung him now. Perhaps then she might have continued to love him. Were they all alike, these women? All vain, unstable, irrational creatures; best acted on by the jugglery of false sentiment, alive only to the unworthy influence of morbid pique or unbridled passion, tempted to evil by an infamous notoriety, or dazzled by the glare of an impossible romance? He asked himself these questions, and his own observation afforded no satisfactory reply.

He had lived much at the Court of France, when that Court, with all its splendour and all its refinement, was little distinguished by self-denial in man or self-restraint in woman. Amongst those of his own age and sphere, he was accustomed to hear conjugal fidelity spoken of as a prejudice not only superfluous but unrefined and in bad taste. The wife *as* a wife was to be considered a proper object of pursuit, the husband to be borne with as an encumbrance, but in right of his office habitually to be derided, outwitted, and despised. That a woman should care for the man to whom she had plighted her faith at the altar seemed an absurdity not to be contemplated; that a man should continue to love the girl he had chosen was a vulgarity to which no gentleman would willingly plead guilty. Such were the morals of the stage, such was the too common practice of real life. And George had laughed with the rest at the superstition of matrimony, had held its sanctity in derision, perhaps trifled with its vows *en mousquetaire.*

And now was the punishment overtaking him at last? Was the foundation of his happiness, like that of others, laid in sand, and the whole edifice crumbling to pieces in his very sight? It was hard, but he was a man, he thought, and he must bear it as best he might. As for the possibility that Cerise should actually love another, he dismissed such an idea almost ere it was formed. That was not the grievance, he told Emerald aloud, while he stood by the good horse on the solitary moor, it was that Cerise should not love him! He could scarcely believe it, and yet he could see she was unhappy, she for whose happiness he would sacrifice so willingly wealth, influence, position, life itself, everything but his honour. When he thought of the pale pining face, it seemed as if a knife was driven into his heart.

He sprang into the saddle, and once more urged his horse to a gallop. Once more the brown heathery acres flew back beneath his eyes, but Emerald began to think that all this velocity was a waste of power when unaccompanied by the music of the hounds, and stopped of his own accord to look for them within a bowshot of the Great North Road where it led past the Hamilton Arms. Ordinary people do not usually talk to themselves, but I believe every man speaks aloud to his horse.

"Quite right, old fellow!" said Sir George, as if he were addressing a comrade. "I may as well stop and have a glass of beer, for I am as hot as you are, and I daresay twice as thirsty."

Emerald acquiesced with a snort and a prolonged shake the moment his rider's foot touched the ground, and Sir George, filling the whole of the narrow passage to the bar, bounced against Florian de St. Croix returning from an interview with the abbé on the first floor. Each must have been thinking of the other, for both exclaimed mentally, "The very man!" while at the same instant Slap-Jack, looking rather sheepish, and not in his usual spirits, slunk out of another room and tried to leave unobserved.

"Foretop, there!" hallooed Sir George good-humouredly, "as you are aloft, look smart and make yourself useful. See that lubber gives Emerald a go-down of chilled water, and tows him about at a walk till I come out."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Slap-Jack, his whole face brightening up. He loved to be so addressed by his old commander; and although he was to-day not without his own troubles, or he would scarce have been here so early, he set to work to obey instructions with a will.

Florian accompanied the new arrival into the bar, where Mrs. Dodge, all smiles and ribbons, drew for this honoured guest a measure of the best with her own fat hands; while Alice, who looked as if she had been crying, hovered about admiringly, watching Sir George quench his thirst as if he had been some rare and beautiful animal she had paid her penny to see.

"Good stuff!" said the baronet, setting down his jug with a sigh. "Better than *vin ordinaire*, or even three-water grog. Eh, Florian?"

But Florian's mind was bent on other matters.

"You are always so much occupied," said he, "that I can never catch you for half an hour alone. Will you have your horse led home, and walk back the short way with me? We

had more leisure on board the *Bashful Maid*, after all; especially in the Trades."

Sir George assented cheerily. For the moment his gloomy thoughts fled at the sound of the other's voice. They were tried comrades in many a rough adventure, and it takes a good deal to turn a man's heart from an old friend.

"Of course I will," he assented, putting his arm through Florian's. "We can cross the deer-park, and go over the footbridge above the waterfall. It saves nearly half a mile. Slap-Jack," he added, emerging from the house, "take that horse home, under easy sail, d'ye mind? and see him well dressed over when you get to the stable."

Then he and Florian strolled quietly away to cross the deer-park and thread a certain picturesque dingle adorned by the above-mentioned waterfall. It was the show bit of scenery at Hamilton Hill, and the track leading to it was so precipitous as to be impassable by any four-footed animal less nimble than a goat.

It was Slap-Jack's duty to conduct Emerald by an easier route to his own stable; and for this purpose the adventurous seaman proceeded to "get up the side," as he called it, an ascent which he effected with some difficulty, and so commenced his voyage with considerable prudence, according to orders, "under easy sail." But Emerald's blood was up after his gallop. The seaman's awkward seat and unskilled hand on the rein irritated him considerably. He fretted, he danced, he sidled, he snatched at his bridle, he tossed his head, he showed symptoms of mutiny from the very beginning.

"I knowed as we should make bad weather of it," said Slap-Jack, relating his adventure that evening in the servants' hall, "when we come into open sea. Steer he wouldn't, and every time I righted him he broached-to, as if he was going down stern foremost. So I lashed the helm amid-ships, and held on by my eyelids to stand by for a capsize."

In truth the horse soon took the whole affair into his own management, and after one or two long reaching plunges, that would have unseated Slap-Jack had he not held on manfully by the mane, started off at a furious gallop, which brought him to his own stable-yard in about five minutes from the time he left the inn door.

Cerise, wandering pale and listless amongst her roses, heard the clatter of hoofs entering at this unusual pace, and rushed to the stables in some alarm. She was relieved to find that no serious casualty had occurred, and that Slap-Jack, very much out of breath, with his legs trembling and power-

less from the unwonted exercise, was the only sufferer. He gasped and panted sadly; but she gathered that he had been ordered to bring the horse quietly home, at which she could not forbear smiling, and that Sir George was going to walk back the short way. It was a chance to be seized eagerly. She had been very low and dispirited all the morning, wishing she had spoken out to him before he went, and now here came another opportunity. Cerise was still young, and, to use the graphic expression of her own country, "a woman to the very tips of her fingers." She ran upstairs, put on her prettiest hat, and changed her breast-knots for fresh ribbons of newer gloss and a more becoming colour. Then she fluttered out through her garden, and crossing the home-park with a rising colour and a more elastic step, as the fresh air told upon her animal spirits, reached one end of the wooden footbridge as the two gentlemen arrived at the other.

She had only expected *one*. It was a disappointment; more, it was an embarrassment. She coloured violently, and looked, as she felt, both agitated and put out. Sir George could not but observe her distress, and again his heart ached with the dull wearing unacknowledged pain. He jumped to conclusions; a man under such an influence always does. It seemed clear to him that his wife must have chosen this direction for her walk in order to meet the Jesuit. He did not blame Florian, for the priest had himself proposed they should return together, and could not, therefore, have expected her. Stay! Was this a blind? He stole a glance at him, and thought he seemed as much discomposed as her ladyship. All that he could disentangle afterwards. In the meantime one thing alone seemed clear. That Cerise, contrary to her usual habits, had come this distance on foot to meet her lover, and had found—her husband! He laughed to himself fiercely, with a grim savage humour, and felt as once or twice formerly in a duel, when his adversary, taking unfair advantage, had been foiled by his own act. Well, he would fight his battle at least with all the skill of fence he knew; patiently, warily, scientifically, without loss of temper or coolness, neglecting no precaution, overlooking no mistake, and giving no quarter.

He could not help thinking of his old comrade, Bras-de-Fer, as he remembered him, one gloomy morning in Spain, stripped and in silk stockings on the wet turf outside the lines, with the deadliest point in three armies six inches from his throat, and how nothing but perfect self-command and endurance had given his immovable old comrade the victory. His

heart softened when he thought of those merry campaigning days, but not to Lady Hamilton nor to the pale thoughtful Jesuit on the other side.

It was scarcely a pleasant walk home for any one of the three. Florian, though he loved the very ground she trod on, was disconcerted at her ladyship's inopportune appearance just as he thought he was gaining ground in his canvass, and had prepared the most telling arguments for the conversion of his proselyte. Moreover, he had now passed the stage at which he could converse freely with Cerise in company, and grudged her society even to the man who had a right to it. Alone with her he had plenty to say ; but, without approaching forbidden topics, he had acquired a habit of conversing on abstruse and speculative subjects, interesting enough to two persons in the same vein of thought, but which strike even these as exaggerated when submitted to the criticism of a third. Many a pleasant and harmonious duet jangles painfully when played as a trio. He was impatient now of any interference with Lady Hamilton's opinions. These he considered his own, in defiance of a thousand husbands; and so strangely constituted is the human mind, he could presume to be jealous even of the vague, shadowy, unsubstantial share in her mind that he imagined he possessed.

So he answered in monosyllables, and took nothing off the constraint under which they all laboured. Sir George conversed in a cold formal tone on indifferent matters, and was as unlike himself as possible. He addressed his remarks alternately to Florian and Cerise, scanning the countenance of each narrowly the while. This did not tend to improve their good understanding ; and Lady Hamilton, walking with head erect and set face, looking straight before her, dared not trust herself to answer. It was a relief when they reached the house, and most of all to her, for she rushed upstairs and locked herself into her own room, where she could be miserable to her heart's content.

It was hard for this fair young wife, good, loving, and true, to seek that refuge, so cruelly wounded, twice in one day.

CHAPTER L

CAPTAIN BOLD

I HAVE mentioned that Slap-Jack, too, while he rode perforce so rapidly homewards, was pursued by a black Care of his own, waiting but a momentary halt to leap up behind. Even with a foretop-man, though, perhaps, no swain ought to have a better chance, the course of true love does not always run smooth. There was a pebble now ruffling Slap-Jack's amatory stream, and that pebble was known at the Hamilton Arms as Captain Bold. He might have had a score of other designations in a score of other places; in fact, he was just the sort of gentleman whom one name would suffice less than one shirt; but here, at least, he was welcomed, and, to a certain extent, trusted under that title.

Now Captain Bold, if he ever disguised himself for the many expeditions in which he boasted to have been engaged, must have done considerable violence to his feelings by suppressing the three peculiarities for which he was most conspicuous, and in which he seemed to take the greatest pride. These specialities were the captain's red nose, his falsetto voice, and his bay mare. The first he warmed and comforted with generous potations at all hours, for though not a deep, he was a frequent drinker; the second, he exercised continually in warbling lyrics tending to the subversion of morals—in shrieking out oaths denoting a fertile imagination, with a cultivated talent for cursing—and in narrating interminable stories over his cups, of which his own triumphs in love and war formed the groundwork; the third —he was never tired of riding to and fro over the moor, of going to visit in the stable, or of glorifying in the taproom for the edification of all comers, expatiating on her shape, her qualities, her speed, her mettle, and her queer temper, amenable to no authority but his own.

The captain's first acquaintance with Mrs. Dodge dated some two months back, when he entered the hostelry one stormy evening, and swaggered about the stable-yard and

premises as if thoroughly familiar with the place. This did not astonish the landlady, who, herself a late arrival, concluded he was some old customer of her predecessor's; but, hazarding that natural supposition to an ancient ostler, who had been at the Hamilton Arms from a boy, and never slept out of the stable since he could remember, she was a little surprised to learn old Robin had no recollection whatever of the captain, though he was perfectly well acquainted with the mare. That remarkable animal had been fed and dressed over by his own hands, he declared, only last winter, and was then the property of a Quaker from the East Riding, a respectable looking gentleman as ever he clapped eyes on—warm, no doubt, for the mare was in firstrate condition, and her master paid him from a purse full of broad pieces—a *wet* Quaker, old Robin thought, by reason of his smelling so strong of brandy when he mounted before daylight in the morning.

Mrs. Dodge, conversing with her guest of the wonderful mare, mentioned her old servant's reminiscences.

"Right!" exclaimed the captain, with his accustomed flourish—"right as my glove! or, I should say, my dear madam, right as your own bodice! A Quaker—very true! A man about my own size, with a—well, a *prominent* nose. Pale, flaxen-haired; would have been a good-looking chap with a little more colouring; and respectable—most respectable! Oh yes! that's the Quaker I bought her of, and a good bargain I made. We'll drink the Quaker's health, if you please. A very good bargain!"

And the captain laughed heartily, though Mrs. Dodge could not, for the life of her, see the point of his jest. But, while she reprobated his profane conversation, and entertained no very profound respect for his general character, the captain was yet a welcome guest in Mrs. Dodge's sanctum. His anecdotes were so lively—his talk was so fluent—he took off his glass with so gallant a flourish to her own and her niece's health, paying them, at the same time, such extravagant compliments of the newest town mode—that it was impossible to damp this genial spirit with an austerity which must have been assumed, or rebukes uttered by lips endeavouring to repress a smile.

But with Alice it was not so; she held the captain in a natural abhorrence, and shrank from him as people sometimes do from a toad or other reptile, when she happened to meet him in passages, staircases, or out-of-the-way corners, never permitting him to approach her unless protected by the company of her aunt.

Mrs. Dodge, however, would sometimes spend an hour and more in certain household duties upstairs, leaving Alice to mind the bar during her absence. The girl was singing over her needlework, according to custom, thinking, in all probability, of Slap-Jack, when, much to her annoyance, the captain's red nose protruded itself over the half-door, followed, in due course, by his laced coat, his jack-boots, and the rest of his gaudy, tarnished, and somewhat dissipated person. Seeing Alice alone, he affected to start with pleasure, made a feint of retiring, and then insinuated himself towards the fireplace, with a theatrical gallantry that was to her, of all his airs and graces, the most insupportable.

"Divine Alice!" he exclaimed, flourishing his dirty hand, adorned with rings, "alone in her bower, and singing over her sampler like a siren. The jade Fortune owed honest Jack Bold this turn. Strike him blind if she didn't! He comes for a vulgar drain, and lo! a cordial—the elixir of life—the rosy dew of innocence—the balmy breath of beauty!"

"What d'ye lack, sir?" asked Alice, contemptuously ignoring this rhodomontade, and stretching her pretty hand towards a shelf loaded with divers preparations of alcohol well known to the visitor.

"What I lacked, my sweetest," said the unabashed captain, "when I entered this bower of bliss and bastion of beauty, was a mere mortal's morning draught—a glass of strong waters, we will say, with a clove in it, or perhaps a mouthful of burnt brandy, to keep out the raw moorland air. What I lack now, since I have seen your lovely lips, seems to be the chaste salute valour claims from beauty. We will take the brandy and cloves afterwards!"

So speaking, the captain moved a little round table out of his way, and, taking off his cocked hat with a flourish, advanced the red nose and forbidding face very close to Alice, as if to claim the desired salute. In his operations, the skirt of his heavily laced coat brought work, work-box, thimble, and all to the ground. Alice stooped to pick them up. When she rose again her colour was very bright, possibly from the exertion, and she pointed once more to the bottles.

"Give your orders, sir," said she angrily, "and go! I am sure I never—I never expected to be rude to a customer, but —there—it's too bad—I won't stand it, I won't—not if I go up to my aunt in her bedroom this very minute!"

Poor Alice was now dissolved in tears, but, true to her instincts, filled the captain his glass of brandy all the same. He drank it slowly, relishing every drop, and, keeping his

person between Alice and the half-door, seemed to enjoy her confusion, which, obviously, from the conceited satisfaction of his countenance, he attributed to an unfortunate passion for himself. Suddenly her face brightened, a well-known footstep hastened up the passage, and the next moment Slap-Jack entered the bar. Alice dashed away her tears, the captain assumed an attitude of profound indifference, and the new arrival looked from one to the other with a darkening brow.

"What, again?" said he, turning fiercely on the intruder, and approaching very close, in that aggressive manner which is almost equivalent to a blow. "I thought as I'd given you warning already to let this here young woman be. You think as you're lying snug enough, maybe, in smooth water, with your name painted out and a honest burgee at your truck; but I'll larn you better afore I've done with you, if you comes cruising any more in my fishing-ground. There's some here as 'll make you show your number, and we'll soon see who's captain then!"

Honest Jack Bold, as he called himself, was not deficient in self-command. Sipping his brandy with the utmost coolness, he turned to Alice, and, motioning towards Slap-Jack, boiling over within six inches of him, observed, in his high-quavering voice—

"Favoured lover, I presume! Visits here, I hope, with our good aunt's sanction. Seems a domestic servant by his dress, though I gather, from the coarseness of his language, he has served before the mast!—a sad come-down, sweet Alice! for a girl with your advantages. These seamen, I fancy, are all given to liquor. Offer your bachelor something to drink, and score it, if you please, to my account. A sad come-down!—a sad come-down! Why burn me, mistress Alice, with your good looks, you might almost have married a gentleman—you might, indeed! Sink me to the lowest depths of matrimonial perdition, if you might not!"

Slap-Jack could have stood a good deal, but to be offered a dram by a rival in this off-hand way, through the medium of his own sweetheart, was more than flesh and blood could swallow. In defiance of Alice's entreaties, who was horribly frightened at the prospect of a quarrel, and as pale now as she had been flushed a few minutes back, he shook a broad serviceable fist in the captain's face, and burst out—

"A gentleman! you swab! What do you know about gentlemen? All the sort as you've seen is them that hangs at Tyburn; and look, if you're not rove up there yourself some fine morning, my saucy blade, with your night-cap over your

ears, and a bunch of rue in your hand. Gentleman indeed! Now look you here, Captain John Bold, or whatever other *alias* your papers may show when they're overhauled, if ever I catches of you in here alone, a-parsecutin' of my Alice, or even hears o' your so much as standin' off-and-on, a-watchin' for her clearin' out, or on the open moor, or homeward bound, or what not, I'll smash that great red nose of yours as flat as a Port-Royal jelly-fish, you ugly, brandy-faced, bottle-nosed, lop-sided son of a gun!"

The captain had borne with considerable equanimity his adversary's quarrelsome gestures and threats of actual violence, keeping very near the door, corporeally, indeed, and entrenching himself morally, as it were, in the dignity of his superior position, but at these allusions to his personal appearance he lost all self-control. His face grew livid, his very nose turned pale, his eyes blazed, and his hand stole to the short cutlass or hanger he carried at his side. Something in Slap-Jack's face, whose glance followed the movement of his fingers, checked any resort to this weapon, and even in his fury, the captain had the presence of mind to place himself outside the half-door of the bar; but when there he caught hold of it with both hands, for he was trembling all over, and burst forth—

"You think the sun is on your side of the hedge, my fine fellow, I daresay, but you'll know better before a week's out. Ay, you may laugh, but you'll laugh the other side of your mouth when the right end is uppermost, as uppermost it will be, and I take you out on the terrace with a handkerchief over your eyes, and a file of honest fellows, with carbines loaded, who are in my pay even now. Ay, you'll sing small then, I think, for all your blare and bluster to-day. You'll sing small, d'ye hear? on the wet grass under the windows at Hamilton Hill, and your master 'll sing small with his feet tied under his horse's belly, riding down the North Road and on his way to Tyburn, under a warrant from King Ja——. Well, a warrant from the king; and that Frenchified jade, your missus, 'll sing small"—

But here the captain sprang to the door, at which his mare was standing ready, leaped to the saddle, and rode off at a gallop, cursing his tongue the while, which, in his exasperation, he had suffered to get so entirely the better of his discretion.

It was high time; Slap-Jack, infuriated at the allusion to his lady, had broken from the gentle grasp of Alice, and in another moment would have been upon him. He even followed the mare for a few paces and shook his fist at the

retreating figure fleeting away over the moor like the wind; then he returned to his sweetheart, and drowned his wrath in a flagon of sound ale drawn by her sympathising hands.

He soon ceased to think of his opponent's threats, for when the excitement of action was over, the seaman bore no malice and nursed no apprehensions; but Alice, who, like many silent, quiet women, was of a shrewd and reflective turn of mind, pondered them deeply in her heart. She seemed to see the shadow of some great danger threatening her lover and the family whose bread he ate.

CHAPTER LI

SIR MARMADUKE

A WOMAN'S wits are usually quick to detect intrigue, and are sharpened all the more keenly when she suspects danger to one she loves.

The threats Captain Bold had been so indiscreet as to utter afforded an explanation of much that had hitherto puzzled Alice in the habits and demeanour of her aunt's guests. It seemed clear enough now, that the shrewd, dark-clothed gentleman upstairs, and his friend from the Hill, were involved in a treasonable plot, of which her abhorred suitor with the bay mare was a paid instrument. From the hints dropped by the last, it looked that some signal vengeance was contemplated against Sir George Hamilton, and worse still, against her own beloved Slap-Jack. Alice was not the girl to sit still with folded hands and bemoan herself in such a predicament. Her first impulse was at once to follow Sir George home and warn him of all she knew, all she suspected; but reflecting how little there was of the former, and how much of the latter; remembering, moreover, that one chief conspirator was his fast friend, and then in his company, she hesitated to oppose her own bare word against the latter's influence, and resolved to strike boldly across the moor till she saw the chimneys of Brentwood, and tell her tale to Sir Marmaduke Umpleby, a justice of the peace, therefore, in all probability, a loyal subject of King George.

It was a long walk for a girl accustomed to the needle-work and dish-scouring of an indoor life, but Alice's legs had been stretched and her lungs exercised on the south-country downs, till she could trip over a Yorkshire moor as lightly and as gracefully, if not so swiftly, as a hind. Leaving word, then, for her aunt, that she should not be back till after dark, she put on her best shoe-buckles, her lace pinners, her smartest hat, and tucking her red stuff gown through its pocket-holes, started boldly on her mission in the teeth of an east wind.

Brentwood was a snug-looking long grey house, lying low

amongst tall trees in a little green nook of the moor, sheltered by brown swelling undulations that rose all round. A straight road, rough in some places, swampy in others, and execrable in all, led up to the door, between two dilapidated stone walls coped with turf. There was no pretence of porch or other abutment, as in newer residences, nor were there curves round clumps of plantation, sweeps to coast flower-beds, nor any such compromise from a direct line in the approach to the house. The inmates of Brentwood might see their visitors for a perspective of half a mile from the front windows, and at these windows would take up their position from dawn till dark.

Dame Umpleby and her five daughters were at their usual station when Alice appeared in sight. These young ladies, of whom the eldest seemed barely fifteen, were being educated under their mother's eye, that is to say, they were writing out recipes, mending house-linen, reading the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and working samplers, according to their several ages. They had a spinet also, somewhat out of repair, on which the elder girls occasionally practised, but father would not stand this infliction within earshot, and father was now enjoying his after-dinner slumbers in their common sitting-room.

Sir Marmaduke did not appear to advantage in the attitude he had chosen. His wig was off, and hung stately on its own account over a high-backed chair. His round smooth head was discoloured in patches like the shield of a tortoise, his heavy features looked the heavier that they were somewhat swollen after eating, the lower jaw had dropped comfortably to its rest, and his whole frame was sunk in an attitude of complete and ungainly repose. A half-smoked pipe had dropped from his relaxed fingers to the floor, and a remnant of brown ale stood at his elbow in a plain silver tankard on the table.

The apartment was their usual family parlour, as it was then called, and therefore plainly, not to say meanly, furnished. Sir Marmaduke being a gentleman of ancient blood and considerable possessions, owned flocks and herds in plenty, fertile corn-land under the plough, miles of pasturage over the hill. He kept good horses in his stable, fleet greyhounds in his kennel, and a cast of hawks in his mews, only surpassed by those of Sir George Hamilton; but he could not afford, he said, to waste his substance on "Frenchified luxuries," and this opprobrious term seemed to comprise all such vanities as carpets, curtains, couches, pictures, and

ornaments of every description. For indoors, he argued, why, he didn't frequent that side of the house much himself, and what had been good enough for his mother must be good enough for his wife and the girls. When hard pressed, as be sure he was by these on the score of certain damask hangings and gorgeous carpets at Hamilton Hill, he would reply that Lady Hamilton was the sweetest woman in Europe, whereat his audience dissented, but that extravagance was her crying fault, only excusable on the ground of her foreign birth and education, and it couldn't go on. It could *not* go on! He should live to see his neighbour ruined, and sold up, but he should be sorry for it, prodigiously sorry! for Hamilton was a good fellow, very strong in the saddle, and took his bottle like a man!

He had spoken to the same effect just before he dropped asleep, and Dame Umpleby with her daughters had continued the subject in whispers till it died out of itself just as the far-off figure of Alice, coming direct to the house, afforded fresh food for conversation. Margery being the youngest, saw the arrival some half-second before her sisters, and for one rapturous moment believed her dearest visions were realised, and little Red Riding Hood was coming to pay them a visit in person; but this young woman being about five years of age, and of an imaginative temperament, was already accustomed to disillusions, and felt, therefore, more disgusted than surprised when her eldest sister Janet suggested the less startling supposition that it was Goody Round's granddaughter on an errand for red salve and flannel, offering, at the same time, to procure those palliatives in person from the store-room. Janet, like most eldest girls in a large family, was as steady as a matron, taking charge of the rest with the care of an aunt, and the authority of a governess. But the mother's sight was sharper than her children's.

"Bessie Round's not half the height of that girl," said she, rising for a better look. "See how she skims across the stepping-stones at the ford! She's in a hurry, whoever she is! But that is no reason, Margery, why you shouldn't learn your spelling, nor that I should have to unpick the last half-dozen stitches in Marian's sampler. Hush! my dears, I pray you! Less noise, or you will wake father!"

Pending this discussion, Alice, whose pace was at least twice as good as Bessie Round's, had reached the house. She looked very pretty, all flushed and tumbled out of the moorland breezes, and Dame Umpleby's heart reproached her for the hundredth time that she had allowed her husband

to establish as a rule the administration of justice in his own room, unhampered by her presence. He had once in their early married life admitted her assistance to his judicial labours, but such confusion resulted from this indulgence that the experiment was never repeated.

Though Sir Marmaduke had been married a score of years, and was the model of a steady-going, middle-aged gentleman, such is the self-tormenting tendency of the female mind that his wife could not mark without certain painful twinges, the good looks of this visitor waiting at the hall-door, lest her errand should prove as usual—"A young woman, if you please, wants to see Sir Marmaduke on justice business!" Such twinges are generally prophetic. Long before Margery and Marian had settled a disputed point as to the identity of the wolf and little Red Riding Hood's grandmother in the story-book, a plethoric serving-man, who had obviously been employing his leisure in the kitchen, like his master in the parlour, entered with a red shining face, and announced Alice's arrival in the very words his mistress knew so well.

Sir Marmaduke woke up with a start, rubbed his eyes, his nose, the whole of his bald head, and replied as usual—

"Directly, Jacob, directly. Offer the young woman a horn of small ale, and show her into the justice-room."

It was a tradition at Brentwood that no visitor, however humble, should walk six steps within the threshold dry-lipped, and old Jacob, who loved a gossip only less than a drink, was exceedingly careful not to break through this hospitable practice.

Sir Marmaduke, blinking like an owl in the daylight, adjusted his wig, shook himself to rights, and, ignoring his wife's uneasiness, wandered off scarce half-awake, to receive the new arrival in the justice-room. There were few eaves-droppers at Brentwood, least of all at that hour of the day. A general stagnation habitually pervaded the establishment from dinner-time till dusk. The men slumbered over the fire in the hall, the women, at least the elder ones, crossed their arms under their aprons, and dozed in the kitchen; the younger maids stole out to meet their bachelors in the wood-house or the cattle-sheds. Even Rupert, the old mastiff, retired to his kennel, and unless the provocation was of an extraordinary nature, refused to open more than one eye at a time, so that fear was uncalled-for, which Alice obviously entertained, lest her communication to Sir Marmaduke should be overheard. The baronet concluding it was the usual

grievance, cast a hasty glance at the girl as he passed on to the leathern arm-chair that formed his throne, but seating himself thereon, and obtaining a full view of her face, gave a start of recognition, and exclaimed in surprise—

"Why, it's mistress Alice! Take a chair, mistress Alice, and believe me, you're welcome. Heartily welcome, however tangled be the skein you've brought me to unravel."

Pretty Alice of the Hamilton Arms was as well known as the sign of that hostelry itself to every hard-riding, beer-drinking, cattle-jobbing country gentleman within fifty miles. Sir Marmaduke often said, and sometimes swore, that "he didn't care how they bred 'em in London and thereabouts, but to *his* mind Alice was the likeliest girl he saw north o' Trent, be t'other who she might!"

The object of his admiration, standing very near the door, hoped "Lady Umpleby and the young ladies were well," a benevolent wish it seemed she had walked all this distance to express, for she immediately broke down, and began to adjust plaits in the hem of her pinners with extreme nicety. Sir Marmaduke, marking her confusion, suspected it must be the old business after all.

"Take a seat, my dear," repeated he paternally. "Don't ye be frightened; nobody will hear ye here. Take your own time, and tell your own story."

Thus adjured, Alice, still close to the door, looked anxiously round, and whispered—

"Oh! Sir Marmaduke, are you quite sure nobody can hear us?"

The justice smiled, and pulled his wig straight. It was evident she had something very secret to confide. He was glad she had come to him at once, and what a pretty girl she was! Of course, he would stand her friend. He told her so.

"Oh! Sir Marmaduke," said Alice, "it's something dreadful. It's something I've found out. I know I shall get killed by some of them! It's a plot, Sir Marmaduke! That's what it is. There!"

The justice started. His brow clouded, and his very wig seemed to come awry. He was a stout-hearted gentleman enough, and feared danger certainly less than trouble. But a plot! Ever since he could remember in his own and his father's time, the word had been synonymous with arrests, imprisonments, authorised oppression, packed juries, commissions of inquiry, false witness, hard swearing, and endless trouble to justices of the peace. It was, perhaps, the one

thing of all others that he most dreaded, so his first impulse was, of course, to ignore the whole matter.

"Plot! my dear. Pooh! Nonsense! What do you know of plots, except a plot to get married, you little jade? Hey? Plot! There's no such thing in these days. We smothered the whole brood, eggs and all, in Fifteen. We'll give you a drop of burnt sherry, and send you home behind Ralph on a pillion. Don't ye trouble your pretty head about plots, my dear. If you'd seen as many as I have, you'd never wish for another."

Alice thought of Slap-Jack, and collected her ideas.

"I'm sure," said she, "I wouldn't have taken the liberty of coming to trouble your honour, but I thought as you would like to know, Sir Marmaduke, being as it concerns Sir George Hamilton, who's aunt's landlord, you know, Sir Marmaduke, and his sweet lady; and if they were to come for to be taken and carried to London town with their feet tied under their horses' bellies, Sir Marmaduke, why whatever would become of us all?"

The picture that Alice conjured up was too much for her, and she dried her tears on her apron. Sir Marmaduke opened his eyes wider than he had done since he closed them for his afternoon nap.

"Sir George Hamilton!" he repeated, in great astonishment; "how can he be implicated? What d'ye mean, my dear? Dry your eyes, there's a good girl, and tell your story from the beginning."

She had recovered her composure now, and made her statement lucidly and without reserve. She detailed the whole circumstances of her lover's dispute with Captain Bold, and that worthy's threats, from which she gathered, reasonably enough, that another Jacobite rising was imminent, in which their party were to be successful, whereby the loyal subjects of King George, including the Hamiltons, Slap-Jack, her aunt, and herself, were to be ruined, and utterly put to confusion. She urged Sir Marmaduke to lay his hands at once on the conspirators within reach. Three of them, she said, would be together at the Hamilton Arms that very evening. She did not suppose two of the gentlemen would make much resistance, as they seemed to be priests; and fighting, she thought, could not be their trade; while as for the red-nosed captain, with his bay mare, though he talked very big, and said he had served in every country in Europe, why, she would not be afraid to promise that cook and herself could do his business, for that matter, with a couple of brooms and a slop-pail.

Sir Marmaduke laughed, but he was listening very attentively now, altogether changed from the self-indulgent slumberer of half an hour ago. As she continued her story his interest became more and more excited, the expression of his face cleared from lazy indifference into shrewd penetrating common-sense, and denoted the importance he attached to her communication, of which not a word escaped him. At the mention of the red-nosed captain with his bay mare, he interrupted her, dived into a table-drawer, from which he produced a notebook and referred to an entry amongst its red-lined pages.

"Stop a moment, mistress Alice," said he, turning over the leaves. "Here it is. Bay mare, fast, well-bred, kicks in the stable, white hind-foot, star, and snip on muzzle. Owner, middle height, speaks in a shrill voice, long nose, pale face, and flaxen hair in a club."

Alice's eyes kindled with the first part of this description, but she seemed disappointed when he reached the end.

"That's not our captain, Sir Marmaduke," said she. "Our captain's got a squeaky voice, sure enough; but his hair is jet-black, and his face, especially his nose, as red, ay, red as my petticoat. It's the moral of the mare, to be sure, and a wicked beast she is," added Alice reflectively.

Sir Marmaduke pondered.

"Is your captain, as you call him, a good-looking man?" said he slyly.

Alice was indignant.

"As ugly as sin!" she exclaimed. "Bloodshot eyes, scowling eyebrows, and a seam down one cheek that reaches to his chin. No, Sir Marmaduke, to do him justice, he's a very hard-featured gentleman, is the captain."

Sir Marmaduke, keeping his finger between the leaves of his notebook, referred once more to the entry.

"Tastes differ, mistress Alice," said he good-humouredly. "I think I can recognise the gentleman, though I've got him described here, and by one of your sex too, as 'exceedingly handsome-featured, of commanding presence, with an air of the highest fashion.' Never mind. I knew he was somewhere this side of the Border, but did not guess he was such a near neighbour. If it's any satisfaction, I don't mind telling you, my dear, he's likely enough to be in York Gaol before the month's out. In the meantime, don't you let anybody know you've seen me, and keep your captain, if you possibly can, at the Hamilton Arms till I want him."

Alice curtsied demurely. She had caught the excitement

inseparable from everything that resembles a pursuit, by this time, and had so thoroughly entered into the spirit of the game, that she felt she could let the captain make love to her for an hour at a stretch, red nose and all, rather than he should escape out of their clutches.

"And the other gentlemen?" she asked, glancing at the notebook, as if she thought they too might be inscribed on its well-filled pages. "Him that sits upstairs writing all day, and him that lives up with Sir George at the Hill, and only comes down our way about dusk. There can't be much harm about that one, Sir Marmaduke, I think. Such a pale, thin, quiet young gentleman, and for all he seems so unhappy, as meek as a mouse."

"Let the other gentlemen alone, Alice," answered the justice. "You're a good girl, and a pretty one, and you showed your sense in coming over here at once without saying a word to anybody. Now, you'll take my advice, my dear; I'm sure you will. Get home before it's dark. I'd send you with Ralph and old Dapple, but that it would make a talk. Never mind, you've a good pair of legs, I know; so make all the use you can of them. I don't like such a blooming lass to be tramping about these wild moors of ours after nightfall. Tell your aunt to brew you a posset the moment you get home. If she asks any questions, say I told you to come up here about renewing the license. Above all, don't tattle. Keep silence for a week, only a week, and I'll give you leave after that to chatter till your tongue aches. And now, Alice, you're a sensible girl, I believe, and not easily frightened. Listen to what these two priests say. Hide behind the window-curtain, under the bed, anywhere, only find out for certain what they're at, and come again to me."

"But they speak French," objected Alice, whereat her listener's face fell, though he smiled well-pleased when she added, modestly; "not but what I know enough to understand them, if I don't have to answer."

"Quite right, quite right, my dear," assented the justice; "you're a clever girl enough. Mind you show your cleverness by keeping your tongue between your teeth. And now it's high time you were off. Remember what I've told you. Mum's the word, my dear; and fare ye well."

So the justice, opening the door for Alice with all courtesy, imprinted such a kiss upon her blooming face as middle-aged gentlemen of those days distributed liberally without scandal, a kiss that, given in all honour and kindliness, left the maiden's cheek no rosier than before. Then, as soon as the door was

shut, Sir Marmaduke pulled his wig off, and began pacing his chamber to and fro, as was his custom when in unusual perplexity.

"A plot," he reflected; "no doubt of it. Another veritable Jacobite plot, to disturb private comfort and public credit; to make every honest man suspect his neighbour, and to set the whole country by the ears."

Though he had wisely concealed from Alice the importance he really attached to her information, he could not but admit her story was very like many another that had previously warned him of these risings, in one of which, long ago, he had himself been concerned on the other side. His sympathies even to-day were not enthusiastically with his duty. That duty doubtless was, to warn the executive at once. He wished heartily that he knew which of his friends and neighbours was concerned in the business. It would be terrible if some of his intimates (by no means an unlikely supposition) were at its head. He thought it extremely probable that Sir George Hamilton was only named as a victim for a blind, and had really accepted a prominent part in the rising. Could he not give him a hint he was suspected, in time to get out of the way? Sir Marmaduke was not very bitter against the Jacobites; and perhaps it occurred to him, moreover, that if they should get the upper hand, it would be well to have such an advocate as Sir George on the winning side. He might tell him what he had heard, under pretence of asking his assistance and advice. At all events he thought he had shut Alice's mouth for the present, by setting her to watch the conspirators closely in her aunt's house.

"If she finds *them* out," said Sir Marmaduke, rubbing his bald head, "I shall have timely notice of their doings, and if they find *her* out, why, they will probably change the scene of operation with all haste, and I shall have got an exceedingly awkward job off my hands."

CHAPTER LII

THE BOWL ON THE BIAS

IT was Sir Marmaduke's maxim, as he boasted it had been his father's and grandfather's, to sleep on a resolution before putting it in practice. He secured, therefore, a good night's rest and a substantial breakfast ere he mounted his best horse to wait upon his neighbour at Hamilton Hill, ordering the grey to be saddled, because Sir George had sometimes expressed his approval of that animal. The lord of Brentwood was sufficiently a Yorkshireman to seize the opportunity of a deal, even while more important matters were under consideration.

"He was getting on," he meant to tell Sir George. "His nerve was beginning to fail. The grey was as good as gold, but a little too much of a horse for him now. He was scarce able to do the animal justice like a younger man."

And as this suggestion could not but be flattering to the younger man, he thought it not improbable his friend might be tempted to purchase on the spot. So he rode the horse quietly and carefully, avoiding the highroad, which would have taken him past the Hamilton Arms, and threading a labyrinth of bridleways through the moor, very easy to find for those who were familiar with them, but exceedingly puzzling to those who were not.

The grey looked fresh and sleek, as if just out of the stable, when Sir Marmaduke rode into the courtyard at Hamilton Hill, whence he was ushered by Slap-Jack, who had a great respect for him as a "True Blue, without any gammon," to the terrace where Sir George, her ladyship, and Monsieur de St. Croix were engaged in a game of bowls. Sir Marmaduke followed boldly, although, finding he had to confront Lady Hamilton, he was at some pains to adjust his neckcloth and tie-wig, wishing, at the same time, he had got on his flowing Steinkirk cravat and a certain scarlet waistcoat with gold-lace, now under repair.

The game was proceeding with much noise and hilarity,

especially from Sir George. Florian, an adept at every pastime demanding bodily skill, had already acquired a proficiency not inferior to his host's, who was no mean performer. They were a capital match, particularly without lookers-on; but the baronet remarked, with prim inward sarcasm, that he could generally beat his adversary in the presence of Cerise. The very sound of Lady Hamilton's voice seemed to take Florian's attention off the game. She was watching the players now with affected interest—smiling encouragement to her husband with every successful rub—bringing all her artless charms to bear on the man whom she had resolved to win back if she could. She was very humble to-day, but no less determined to make a desperate struggle for her lost dominion, feeling how precious it was now, and that her heart would break if it was really gone for ever. And Sir George saw everything through the distorted glass of his own misgivings.

"All these caressing ways—all these smiles and glances," thought he bitterly, "only prove her the most fickle of women, or the most hypocritical of wives!"

He could not but acknowledge their power, and hated himself for the weakness. He could not prevent their thrilling to his heart, but he steeled it against her all the more. The better he loved her, the deeper was her treachery, the blacker was her crime. There should be no haste, no prejudice, no violence, and—no forgiveness!

All the while he poised his bowl with a frank brow and a loud laugh. He sipped from a tankard on the rustic table with a good-humoured jest. With a success which surprised him, and for which he hated himself while he admired, he acted the part of a confiding, indulgent husband towards Cerise—of a hearty, unsuspicious friend towards St. Croix. And the latter was miserable, utterly and confessedly miserable! Every caress lavished on her husband by the wife, was a shaft that pierced him to the marrow. Every kind word addressed by the latter to himself, steeped that shaft in venom, and sent the evil curdling through his blood.

"Penance," he murmured inwardly. "They talk of penance—of punishment for sin—of purgatory—of hell! Why, *this* is hell! I am in hell already!"

The arrival of Sir Marmaduke, therefore, with his broad brown face, his old-fashioned dress, and his ungainly manners, was felt as a relief to the whole party; and, probably, not one of them separately would have given him half so gratifying a reception as was now accorded by all three. Nevertheless,

his greeting to Lady Hamilton was so ludicrous in its ceremonious awkwardness, that she could scarcely repress a laugh. Catching Florian's eye, she did, indeed, indulge in a smile, which she hoped might be unobserved. So it was by Sir Marmaduke, whose faculties were completely absorbed in his bow; but her husband noted the glance of intelligence exchanged, and scored it up as an additional proof against the pair.

"Good-morrow, Sir George," continued the new arrival, completing his salutations, as he flattered himself, in the newest mode; "and to you, sir," he added, turning rather sternly upon Florian, whom he was even then mentally committing, under a magistrate's warrant, to take his trial for high treason. "I made shift to ride over thus early in order to be sure of finding my host before he went abroad. Harbouring our stag, as we say, my lady, before he rouses; for if I had come across his blemish in the rack as I rode up the park, it would have been a disappointment to myself, and a disgrace to my reputation as a woodsman."

Cerise did not in the least understand, but she bowed her pretty head and answered—

"Yes, of course—clearly—so it would."

"Therefore," continued Sir Marmaduke, somewhat inconsequently, for the sweet foreign accent rang in his ears and heated his brain, as if he had been a younger man. "Therefore, Sir George, I thought you might like to have another look at Grey Plover before I send him to Catterick Fair. He stands ready saddled at this present speaking in your own stable, and if you would condescend to mount and try his paces in the park, I think you must allow that you have seldom ridden a more gallant goer."

Sir Marmaduke was pleased with his own diplomacy. Casting his eyes on her ladyship's pretty feet, he had quite satisfied himself she was too lightly shod to accompany her husband through the most luxuriant herbage of the park. The priest, too, being a Frenchman, would be safe to know little, and care less, about a horse. He could thus secure an uninterrupted interview with his friend, and might, possibly, make an advantageous sale into the bargain.

"Oh, go with him, George!" exclaimed Cerise, thinking to please her husband, who was, as she knew, still boy enough dearly to love a gallop. "Go with him, and ride round by the end of my garden into the park. We can watch you from here. I do so like to see you on horseback!"

He laughed and assented, leaving her again alone with

Florian. Always alone with Florian! He ground a curse between his teeth, as he strode off to the stable, and, trying Grey Plover's speed over the undulating surface of the home-park, took that animal in a grasp of iron that made it exert its utmost powers, in sheer astonishment. Sir Marmaduke, scanning him from under a clump of trees, thought he had never seen his horse go so fast. Once round the home-park —once across the lower end at speed—a leap over the ditch and bank—a breather up the hill—and Sir George trotted Grey Plover back to his owner, in an easy, self-satisfied manner that denoted the horse was sold. Never once had he turned his head towards the terrace where Cerise stood watching. She knew it as well as he did, but made excuses for him to herself. He was so fond of horses—he rode so beautifully — nobody could ride so well unless his whole attention was fixed on his employment. But she sighed nevertheless, and Florian, at her side, heard the sigh, and echoed it in his heart.

"Fifty broad pieces," said Sir George, drawing up to the owner's side, and sliding lightly to the ground.

"He's worth more than that," answered the other, loosening the horse's girths and turning his distended nostrils to the wind. "But we'll talk about the price afterwards. We are not likely to differ on that point. You never rode behind such shoulders, Sir George; and did you remark how he breasted the hill? Like a lion. Ah! if I was twenty years younger, or even ten! But it's no matter for that. I want your advice, Sir George. You carry a grey lining, as we say, to a green doublet. Give me the benefit. There's something brewing here between your house and mine that will come to hell-broth anon, if we take not some order with it in the meantime!"

The other turned his back resolutely on the terrace where his wife was standing, and shot a penetrating glance at the speaker.

"Let it brew!" said he. "If it's hot from the devil's caldron, I think you and I can make shift to drink it out between us."

Sir Marmaduke laughed.

"I don't like the smell of it," he answered, "not to speak of the taste. Seriously, my friend, I've lit on a nest of Jacobites, here, on your own property, at the Hamilton Arms! They've got another of their cursed plots hatching in the chimney-corner, about fit to chip the shell by now. There's a couple of priests in it, of course; a lad, I know well enough,

"I want your advice, Sir George."

with a good bay mare, that has saved his neck in more ways than one, for a twelvemonth past. He's only put to the dirty work, you may be sure, and I can guess, though on this point I have no certain information, there are two or three more honest gentlemen, friends of yours and mine, whom I had rather meet at Otterdale Head with the hounds than see badgered by an attorney-general at the Exchequer Bar or the Old Bailey, with as many witnesses arrayed against them, at half a guinea an oath, as would swear away the nine lives of a cat! A murrain of their plots! say I; there's neither pleasure nor profit in 'em, try 'em which side you will, and I've had my experience o' both!"

Sir George's brow went down, and his lips closed. In his frank, manly face came the pitiless expression of a duellist who spies the weakness of his adversary's sword, and braces his muscles to dash in. He had got the Jesuit, he told himself, "on the hip!" It was all over with the scheme, he felt. Ere such intelligence could have reached his thick-witted neighbour, he argued, it must be known in other, and more dangerous quarters. If he had ever suffered the promised earldom to dazzle him for an instant, his eyes were opened now; that bit of parchment was but a patent for the gallows. He could hang the tempter who had offered it him, within a week! At this reflection the whole current of his passions turned—the man's nature was of the true conquering type—stern, fierce, almost savage, while confronted with his adversary; generous, forbearing, even tender, when the foe was at his feet. The noblest instincts of chivalry were at work within his bosom; they found expression in the simple energy with which he inwardly ejaculated, "No! D——n it! I'll fight fair!"

"My advice," said he quietly, "is easily followed. Do nothing in a hurry—this country is not like France; these cancers often die out of themselves, because the whole body is healthy and full of life, but, for that very reason, if you eradicate them with the knife, your loss of blood is more injurious than the sore itself. Get all the information you can, Sir Marmaduke, and when the time arrives, act with your usual vigour and good sense. Come! Fifty pieces for the grey horse? my man shall fetch him from Brentwood to-morrow."

Sir Marmaduke was well pleased. He flattered himself that he had fulfilled his delicate mission with extraordinary dexterity, and sold Grey Plover very fairly, besides. His friends were warned now, and if they chose to persist in thrusting their heads through a halter, why, he could do no

more. He was satisfied Sir George had taken the hint he meant to offer. Very likely the conspiracy would come to nothing after all, but, at anyrate, it was time to hang Captain Bold. He must see about it that afternoon, so he would take his leave at once, and return to Brentwood by the way he came. Conscious of the disadvantage under which he laboured for want of the red waistcoat, Sir Marmaduke sturdily refused his host's hospitable offer of refreshment, and was steering Grey Plover through the oaks at the end of the avenue by the time George had rejoined his wife and Florian on the terrace.

Walking back, George smiled and shook his head. He was thinking, perhaps, how his neighbour's loyalty was leavened with a strong disinclination to exertion, and no little indulgence for those whose political opinions differed from his own. But the smile clouded over as he approached the terrace. Together again—always together! and in such earnest conversation. He could see his wife's white hands waving with the pretty trick of gesticulation he loved so dearly. What could they have to say? what could *she* have to say that demanded so much energy? If he might only have heard. She was talking about himself; praising his horsemanship, his strength, his courage, his manly character, in the fond, deprecatory way that a woman affects when speaking of the man she loves. Every word the sweet lips uttered made Florian wince and quiver, yet her husband, striding heavily up the terrace steps, almost wished that he could change places with the Jesuit priest.

Florian left her side when Sir George approached; and Cerise, who was conscious of something in her husband's manner that wounded her feelings and jarred upon her pride, assumed a colder air and a reserved bearing, not the least natural to her character, but of late becoming habitual. Everything conspired to increase the distance between two hearts that ought to have been knit together by bonds no misunderstanding nor want of confidence should ever have been able to divide. Sir George, watching his wife closely, addressed himself to Florian—

"Bad news!" said he, whereat she started and changed colour. "But not so bad as it might have been. The hounds are on the scent, my friend; I told you I expected it long ago; and if the fox breaks covert now, as Sir Marmaduke would say, they will run into him as sure as fate. Holloa, man! what ails you? You never used to hoist the white ensign thus, when we cleared for action!"

The Jesuit's discomposure was so obvious as to justify his host's astonishment. Florian felt, indeed, like a man who, having known an earthquake was coming, and wilfully kept it out of his mind, sees the earth at last sliding from beneath his feet. His face grew livid, and the drops stood on his brow. In proportion to his paleness, Lady Hamilton's colour rose. Sir George looked from one to the other with a curling lip.

"There is no occasion for all this alarm," he observed, rather contemptuously. "The fox can lie at earth till the worst danger of the chase is over. Perhaps his safest refuge is the very hen-roost he has skulked in to rob! Cheer up, Florian," he added, in a kinder tone. "You don't suppose I would give up a comrade so long as the old house can cover him! I must only make you a prisoner, that is all, with my lady, here, for your gaoler. Keep close for a week or two, and the fiercest of the storm will have blown over. It will be time enough then to smuggle you back to St. Omer, or wherever you have to furnish your report. Don't be afraid, man. Why, you used to be made of sterner stuff than this!"

Florian could not answer. A host of conflicting feelings filled his breast to suffocation, but at that moment how cheerfully, how gladly, would he have laid down his life for the husband of the woman he so madly loved! Covering his face in his hands he sobbed aloud.

Cerise raised her eyes with a look of enthusiastic approval; but they sank terrified and disheartened by the hard, inscrutable expression of Sir George's countenance. Her gratitude, he thought, was only for the preservation of Florian. They might congratulate each other, when his back was turned, on the strange infatuation that befriended them, and perhaps laugh at his blind stupidity; but he would fight fair. Yes, however hard it seemed, he was a gentleman, and he would fight fair!

CHAPTER LIII

FAIR FIGHTING

O the duel began. The moral battle that a man wages with his own temper, his own passions, words, actions, his very thoughts, and a few days of the uncongenial struggle seemed to have added years to Sir George's life. Of all the trials that could have been imposed on one of his nature, this was, perhaps, the severest, to live day by day, and hour by hour, on terms of covert enmity with the woman best loved —the friend most frankly trusted in the world. Two of the chief props that uphold the social fabric seemed cut away from under him. Outward sorrows, injuries, vexations can be borne cheerfully enough while domestic happiness remains, and the heart is at peace within. They do but beat outside, like the blast of a storm on a house well warmed and watertight. Neither can the utmost perfidy of woman utterly demoralise him who owns some staunch friend to trust, on whose vigorous nature he can lean, in whose manly counsel he can take comfort, till the sharp anguish has passed away. But when love and friendship fail both at once, there is great danger of a moral recklessness which affirms, and would fain believe, that no truth is left in the world. This is the worst struggle of all. Conduct and character flounder in it hopelessly, because it affords no foothold whence to make an upward spring, so that they are apt to sink and disappear without even a struggle for extrication.

Sir George had indeed a purpose to preserve him from complete demoralisation, but that purpose was in itself antagonistic to every impulse and instinct of his nature. It did violence to his better feelings, his education, his principles, his very prejudices and habits, but he pursued it consistently

nevertheless, whilst it poisoned every hour of his life. He went about his daily avocations as usual. He never thought of discontinuing those athletic exercises and field sports which were elevated into an actual business by men of his station at that period, but except for a few thrilling moments at long intervals, the zest seemed to be gone from them all.

He flung his hawks aloft on the free open moor, and cursed them bitterly when they failed to strike. He cheered his hounds in the deep wild dales through which they tracked their game so busily, and hurried Emerald or Grey Plover along at the utmost speed those generous animals could compass, but it was with a grim sullen determination to succeed, rather than with the hearty jovial enthusiasm that naturally accompanies the chase. Hawks, hounds, and horses were neither cordials nor stimulants now. Only anodynes, and scarcely efficacious as such for more than a few minutes at a time.

It had been settled that for a short period, depending on the alarm felt by the country at the proposed rising, and consequent strictness of search for suspected characters, Florian should remain domiciled as before at Hamilton Hill. It was only stipulated that he should not show himself abroad by daylight, nor hold open communication with such of his confederates as might be prowling about the Hamilton Arms. With Sir Marmaduke's goodwill, and the general laxity of justice prevailing in the district, he seemed to incur far less peril by hiding in his present quarters, than by travelling southward even in disguise on his way to the coast. There were plenty more of his cloth, little distinguished by the authorities indeed from non-juring clergymen of the Church of England, who remained quietly unnoticed, on sufferance as it were, in the northern counties. Even if watched, Florian might pass for one of these, so his daily life went on much as before Sir Marmaduke's visit. He did not write perhaps so many letters, for his correspondence with the Continent had been discontinued, but this increase of leisure only gave him more time for Lady Hamilton's society, and as he could not accompany her husband to the moor, for fear of being seen, he now spent every day till dinner-time under the same roof with Cerise.

Sir George used to wonder sometimes in his own heavy heart what they could find to talk about through all those hours that seemed so long to him in the saddle amongst the dales—the dales he had loved so dearly a few short weeks ago, that seemed so wearisome, so gloomy, and so endless

now—wondered what charm his wife could discover in this young priest's society; in which of the qualities, he himself wanted, lay the subtle infineuce that so entwined her when Florian first arrived, that had changed her manner and depressed her spirits of late since they had been more thrown together, and caused her to look so unhappy now that they were soon to part. Stronger and stronger, struggle as he might, grew a horrible conviction that she loved the visitor in her heart. Like a gallant swimmer, beating against the tide, he strove not to give way, battling inch by inch, gaining less with every effort—stationary—receding—till, losing head and heart alike, and wheeling madly with the current, he struck out in sheer despair for the quicksands, instinctively preferring to meet rather than await destruction.

Abroad all the morning from daybreak, forcing himself to leave the house lest he should be unable to resist the temptation of watching her, Sir George gave Cerise ample opportunities to indulge in Florian's society, had she been so inclined. He thought she availed herself of them to the utmost, he thought that while he was chafing and fretting, and eating his own heart far away on those bleak moors, Lady Hamilton, passing gracefully amongst her rose-trees on the terrace, or sitting at ease in her pretty boudoir, appreciated the long release from his company, and made the most of it with her guest. He could fancy he saw the pretty head droop, the soft cheek flush, the white hands wave. He knew all her ways so well. But not for him now—not for him! Then Grey Plover would wince and swerve aside, scared by the fierce energy of that half-spoken oath, or Emerald would plunge wildly forward, maddened by the unaccustomed spur, the light grasp bearing suddenly so hard upon the rein. But neither Emerald nor Grey Plover, mettled hunters both, could afford more than a temporary palliative to the goad that pricked their rider's heart.

Sir George had better have been *more* or *less* suspicious. Had he chosen to lower himself in his own eyes by ascertaining how Lady Hamilton spent her mornings, he would have discovered that she employed herself in filling voluminous sheets with her neat illegible French hand, writing in her boudoir, where she sat *alone.* Very unhappy poor Cerise was, though she scorned to complain. Very pale she grew and languid, going through her housekeeping duties with an effort, and ceasing altogether from the carolling of those French ballads in which the Yorkshire servants took an incomprehensible delight. She seemed, worst sign of all, to

have no heart even for her flowers now, and did not visit the terrace for five days on a stretch. The very first time she went there, George happened to spend the morning at home.

From the window of his room he could see one end of the terrace with some difficulty, and a good deal of inconvenience to his neck; nevertheless, catching a glimpse of his wife's figure as she moved about amongst her rose-trees, he could not resist watching it for a while, neither suspiciously nor in anger, but with something of the dull aching tenderness that looks its last on the dead face a man has loved best on earth. It is, and it is *not*. The remnant left serves only to prove how much is lost, and that which makes his deepest sorrow affords his sole consolation—to feel that love remains while the loved one is for ever gone.

Half a dozen times he rose from his occupation. It was but refitting some tackle on the model brigantine, yet it connected itself, like everything else, with her. Half a dozen times he sat down again with a crick in his neck, and an inward curse on his own folly, but he went back once more just the same. Then he resumed his work, smiling grimly while his brown face paled, for Monsieur de St. Croix had just made his appearance on the terrace.

"As usual, I suppose," muttered Sir George, waxing an inch or two of twine with the nicest care, and fitting it into a block the size of a silver penny. But somehow he could not succeed in his manipulation; he was inventing a self-reefing topsail, but he couldn't get the fore halyards taut enough, and do what he would the jack-stay came foul of the yard. "As usual," he repeated more bitterly. "Easy it is! He's the best helmsman who knows when to let the ship steer herself!" Then he applied once more to his task, whistling an old French quickstep somewhat out of time.

Florian had been watching his opportunity, and took advantage of it at once. He, too, had suffered severely during the past few days. Perhaps, in truth, his greatest torture was to have been deprived of Lady Hamilton's society. He fancied she avoided him, though in this he was wrong, for lately she had hardly given him a thought, except of friendly pity for his lot. Had it been otherwise, Cerise would have taken care to allow no such interviews as the present, because she would have suspected their danger. Young, frank, and as little of a coquette as it was possible for her mother's daughter to be, she had never yet even thought of analysing her feelings towards Florian. And he,

too, was probably fool enough to shrink from the idea of her shunning him, forgetting (as men always do forget the fundamental principles of gallantry in regard to the woman they really love) that such a mistrust would have been a step, and a long one, towards the interest he could not but feel anxious to inspire. Had she been more experienced or less preoccupied, she must have learned the truth from his changing colour, his faltering step, his awkward address, to all others so quiet, graceful, and polite. She was thinking of George, she was low-spirited and unhappy. Florian's society was a change and a distraction. She welcomed him with a kind greeting and a bewitching smile.

The more anxious men are to broach an interesting subject, the more surely do they approach it by a circuitous route. Florian asked half a dozen questions concerning the budding, grafting, and production of roses in general, before he dared approach the topic nearest his heart. Cerise answered good-humouredly, and became more cheerful under the influence of fresh air, a gleam of sun, and the scent of her favourite flowers.

Bending sedulously over an especial treasure, she did not remark how long a silence was preserved by her companion, though rising she could not fail to observe the agitation of his looks, nor the shaking hands with which he strove to assist her in a task already done.

"These are very late roses," said he, in a tone strangely earnest for the enunciation of so simple a remark. "There are still half a dozen more buds to blow, and winter has already arrived."

"That's why I am so fond of them," she replied. "Winter comes too early both in the garden and in the house. I like to keep my flowers as long as I can, and my illusions too."

She sighed while she spoke, and Florian, looking tenderly in her face, noticed its air of languor and despondency. A wild, mad hope shot through his heart, and coming close to her side he resumed—

"It will be a week at least before this green bud blows, and in a week, Lady Hamilton, I shall be gone."

"So soon?" she said, in a low, tender voice, modulated to sadness by thoughts of her own in no way connected with his approaching departure. "I had hoped you would stay with us the whole winter, Monsieur de St. Croix. We shall miss you dreadfully."

"I shall be gone," he repeated mournfully, "and a man in my position can less control his own movements than a

wisp of seaweed on the wave. In a day or two, perhaps in a few hours, I must wish you good-bye, and—and—it is more than probable that I shall never see you again."

Clasping her hands, she looked at him, with her blue eyes wide open, like a child who is half-grieved, half-frightened, to see its plaything broken, yet not entirely devoid of curiosity to know what there is inside. Like a flash came back to him the white walls, the drooping laburnums, the trellised beech-walk in the convent garden, and before him stood Mademoiselle de Montmirail, the Cerise of the old, wild, hopeless days, whom he ought never to have loved, whom least of all should he dare to think of now.

"Do you remember our Lady of Succour?" said he; "do you remember the pleasant springtime, the smiling fields, and the sunny skies of our own Normandy? How different from these grey, dismal hills! And do you remember the day you told me your mother had recalled you to Paris? You cannot have forgotten it! Lady Hamilton, everything else is changed, but I alone remain the same."

The broken voice, the trembling gestures betrayed deep and uncontrollable emotion. Even Cerise could not but feel that this man was strangely affected by her presence, that his self-command was every moment forsaking him, and that already words might be hovering on his lips to which she must not listen. Perhaps, too, there was some little curiosity to hear what those words could be—some half-scornful reflection that when spoken it would be time enough to disapprove—some petulant triumph to think that everybody was not distant, reserved, impenetrable, like Sir George.

"And who wishes you to change?" said she softly. "Not I for one."

"I shall remember those words when I am far away," he answered passionately. "Remember them! I shall think of them day by day, and hour by hour, long after you have forgotten there was ever such a person in existence as Florian de St. Croix. Your director, your worshipper. Cerise! your slave!"

She turned on him angrily. All her dignity was aroused by such an appeal in such a tone, but her indignation, natural as it was, changed to pity when she marked his pale, worn face, his imploring looks, his complete prostration, as it seemed, both of mind and body. It was no fault of hers, yet was it the wreck she herself had made. Angry! No, she could not be angry, when she thought of all he must have suffered, and for herself; when she remembered how this man

had never so much as asked for a kind word in exchange for the sacrifice of his soul. The tears stood in her eyes, and when she spoke again her voice was very low and pitiful.

"Florian," said she, "listen to me. If not for your own sake, at least for mine, forbear to speak words that can never be unsaid. You have been to me, I hope and believe, the truest friend man ever was to woman. Do you think I have forgotten the white chapel above Port Welcome, or the bright morning that made me a happy wife?" Her face clouded, but she resumed in a more composed tone: "We have all our own burdens to bear, our own trials to get through. It is not for *me* to teach *you* that this world is no place of unchequered sunshine. You are right. I shall, perhaps, never see you again. Nay; it is far better so. But let me always remember you hereafter as the Florian de St. Croix on whose truth, and unselfishness, and right feeling Cerise Hamilton could rely, even if the whole world besides should fail, and turn against her at her need!"

He was completely unmanned. Her feminine instinct had taught her to use the only weapon against which he was powerless, and she conquered, as a woman always does conquer, when madly loved by him who has excited her interest, her pity, and her vanity, but who has failed to touch her heart.

"And you will remember me? Promise that!" was all he could answer. "It is enough; it is my reward. What happiness have I, but to obey your lightest wish?"

"You go to France?" she asked cheerfully, opining with some discretion that it would be well to turn the conversation as soon as possible into a less compromising channel. "You will see the marquise? You will be near her, at anyrate? Will you charge yourself with a packet I have been preparing for days, hoping it would be conveyed to my dear mother by no hand but yours?"

It was a masterly stroke enough. It not only changed the whole conversation, but gave Cerise an opportunity of escaping into the house, and breaking up the interview. He bowed assent of course. He would have bowed assent had she bid him shed his own blood then and there on the gravel-walk at her feet; but when she left him to fetch her packet, he waited for her return with the open mouth and fixed gaze of one who has been vouchsafed a vision from another world, and looks to see it just once again before he dies.

The rigging of the brigantine proceeded but slowly. Sir George could not apply himself to his task for five minutes

at a time; and had the tackle of the real *Bashful Maid* ever become so hopelessly fouled and tangled as her model's, she must have capsized with the first breeze that filled her sails. His right hand had forgotten its cunning, and his very head seemed so utterly confused that, to use his own professional metaphor, "He didn't know truck from taffrail; the main-brace from the captain's quadrant."

What a lengthened interview was held by those two on the terrace! Again and again rising and dislocating his neck to look—there they were still! In the same place, in the same attitude, the same earnest conversation! What subject could there be but one to bear all this discussion from two young people like these? So much at least he had learned *en mousquetaire*, but it is difficult to look at such matters *en mousquetaire* when they affect oneself. Ha! She is gone at last. And he, why does he stand there watching like an idiot? Sir George turned once more to the brigantine, and her dolphin-striker snapped short off between his fingers.

Again to the window. Florian not gone yet! And with reason, too, as it seems; for Lady Hamilton returns, and places a packet in his hand. He kisses hers as he bends over it, and hides the packet carefully away in his breast. Zounds! This is too much. But Sir George will command himself. Yes, he will command himself from respect to his own character, if for nothing else. So with an affectation of carelessness, so marked as to be utterly transparent, the baronet walked down to the garden-door, where he could not fail to meet his wife as she re-entered the house for a second time, leaving Florian without. It added little to his peace of mind that her manner was flurried, and traces of recent tears were on her face.

"Cerise," said he, and she looked up smiling; "I beg your pardon, Lady Hamilton, may I ask what was that packet you brought out even now, and delivered to Monsieur de St. Croix?"

She flashed at him a glance of indignant reproach, not, as he believed, to reprove his curiosity, but because he had checked himself in calling her by the name he loved.

"They are letters for madame la marquise, Sir George," she answered coldly; and, without turning her head, walked haughtily past him into the house.

CHAPTER LIV

FRIENDS IN NEED

"WHAT a sky! what weather! what a look-out! what an apartment, and what chocolate!" exclaimed Madame de Montmirail to her maid, in an accent of intense Parisian disgust; while the latter prepared her mistress to go abroad and encounter in the streets of London the atmosphere of a really tolerably fine day for England at the time of year. "Quick, Justine! do not distress yourself about costume. My visits this morning are of business rather than ceremony. And what matters it now? Yet, after all, I suppose a woman never likes to look her worst, especially when she is growing old."

Justine made no answer. The ready disclaimer which would indeed have been no flattery died upon her lips; for Justine also felt aggrieved in many ways by this untoward expedition to the English capital. In the first place, having spent but one night in Paris, she had been compelled to leave it at the very period when its attractions were coming into bloom: in the next, she had encountered, while crossing the Channel, such a fresh breeze, as she was pleased to term *un vent de Polichinelle!* and which upset her digestive process for a week: in the third, though disdaining to occupy a hostile territory with her war material disorganised, she was painfully conscious of looking her worst; while, lastly, she had no opportunity for resetting the blunted edge of her attractions, because in the whole household below-stairs could be discovered but one of the opposite sex, sixty years old, and obviously given, body and soul, to that mistress who cheers while she inebriates.

So Justine bustled about discontentedly, and her expressive French face, usually so pleasant and lively, now looked dull, and bilious, and cross. She brightened up a little, nevertheless, when a chair stopped at the door, and a visitor was announced. The street, though off the Strand, then a fashionable locality, was yet tolerably quiet and

retired. It cheered Justine's spirits to bring up a gentleman's name for admission; and she almost recovered her good-humour when she learned he was a countryman of her own.

The marquise, sipping chocolate and dressed to go out, received her visitor more than cordially. She had been restless at Château-la-Fierté, restless in Paris, restless through her whole journey, and was now restless in London. But restlessness is borne the easier when we have someone to share it with; and this young man had reason to be gratified with the welcome accorded him by so celebrated a beauty as Madame de Montmirail. She might almost have been his mother, it is true; but all his life he had accustomed himself to think of her as the brilliant marquise with whom everybody of any pretence to distinction was avowedly in love, and without looking much at her face, or affecting her society, he accepted the situation too. What would you have? It was *de rigueur*. He declared himself her adorer just as he wore a Steinkirk cravat, and took snuff, though he hated it, from a diamond snuff-box. The marquise could not help people making fools of themselves, she said; and perhaps did not wish to help it. She too had dreamed her dream, and all was over. The sovereignty of beauty can at no time be disagreeable, least of all when the bloom begins to fade, and the empire grows day by day more precarious If young Château-Guerrand chose to be as absurd as his uncle, let him singe his wings, or his wig, or any part of his attire he pleased. She was not going to put her lamp out because the cockchafer is a blunderer, and the moth a suicide.

He was a good-looking young gentleman enough, and in Justine's opinion seemed only the more attractive from the air of thorough coxcombry with which his whole deportment, person, and conversation were imbued. He had quarrelled with his uncle, the prince-marshal, on the score of that relative's undutiful conduct. The veteran had paid the young soldier's debts twice, and lo! the third time he remonstrated. His nephew, under pretext of an old wound disabling the sword-arm, obtained permission to retire from the army, thinking thus to annoy his uncle, and accepted an appointment as attaché to the French embassy at the Court of St. James's, for which he was specially unfitted both by nature and education.

"You arrived, madame, but yesterday," said he, bowing over the hand extended to him, with an affectation of

extreme devotion. "I learned it this morning, and behold I fly here on the instant, to place myself, my chief, and all the resources of my country, at the disposition of madame."

"Of course," she answered, smiling; "but in the meantime, understand me, I neither want yourself, however charming, nor your chief, however discreet, nor the resources of your country and mine, however powerful. I am here on private affairs, and till they are concluded I shall have no leisure to enter society. What I ask of your devotion now is, to sit down in that chair, and tell me the news, while I finish my chocolate in peace."

He obeyed delighted — evidently, she was rejoiced to meet him here, so unexpectedly, and could not conceal her gratification. He was treated like an intimate friend, an established favourite — Justine had retired. The marquise loitered over her chocolate. She looked well, wonderfully handsome for her age, and she had never appeared so kind. "Ah, rogue!" thought this enviable youth, apostrophising the person he most admired in the world, "must it always be so? mothers and daughters, maids, wives, and widows.— No escape, *parbleu!* and no mercy. What is it about you, my boy, that thus prostrates every creature in a petticoat before the feet of Casimir de Château-Guerrand? Is it looks, is it manners, is it intellect? Faith, I think it must be a happy mixture of them all!"

"Well!" said the marquise, with one of her victorious glances, "I am not very patient, you know that of old. Quick! out with the news, you who have the knack of telling it so well."

He glanced in an opposite mirror, and looked as fascinating as he could.

"It goes no further, madame, of course; and indeed I would trust you with my head, as I have long since trusted you with my heart."

An impatient gesture of his listener somewhat discomfited him, but he proceeded, nevertheless, in a tone of ineffable self-satisfaction.

"We are behind the scenes, you know, we diplomatists, and see the players before the wigs are adjusted or the paint laid on. Such actors! madame, and oh! such actresses! the old Court is a comedy to which no one pays attention. The young Court is a farce played with a tragic solemnity. Even Mrs. Bellenden has thrown up her part. There is no gooseberry bush now behind which the heir-apparent fills his

basket. Some say that none is necessary, but Mrs. Howard still dresses the Princess, and "—

"Spare me your green-room scandal," interrupted the marquise. "Surely I have heard enough of it in my time. At Fontainebleau, at Versailles, at Marly. I am sick to death of all the gossips and slanders that gallop up and down the backstairs of a palace. Talk politics to me, for Heaven's sake, or don't talk at all!"

"I know not what you call politics, madame," answered the unabashed attaché, "if the Prince's likings and vagaries are not to be included in the term. What say you to a plot, a conspiracy, more, a Jacobite rising? In the north of course! that established stronghold of legitimacy. Do I interest you now?"

He did indeed, and though she strove hard not to betray her feelings, no observer, less preoccupied with the reflection of his own beloved image in the looking-glass, could have failed to remark the gleam of her dark eyes, her rising colour, and quick-drawn breath. Though she recovered herself with habitual self-command, there was still a slight tremor in her voice, while she repeated as unconcernedly as she could—

"In the north, you say? Ah! it is a long distance from the capital. Your department is very likely misinformed, or has itself dressed up a goblin to frighten idle children like yourself, monsieur, into paying more attention to their lessons."

But Casimir, who laid great stress on his own diplomatic importance, vehemently repudiated such an assumption.

"Goblin, indeed!" he replied indignantly. "It is a goblin that will be found to have body and bones, and blood too, I fear, unless I am much misinformed and mistaken. We have nothing to do with it of course, but I can tell you, madame, that we have information of the time, the locality, the numbers, the persons implicated. I believe if you put me to it, I could even furnish you with the names of the accused."

She bowed carelessly.

"A few graziers, I suppose, and cattle-drivers," she observed, "with a Scottish horsebreaker, and a drunken squire or two for leaders. It is scarcely worth the trouble to ask any more questions."

"Far graver than that, madame," he answered, determined not to be put down. "Some of the best names in the north, as I am informed, are already compromised beyond power to retreat. I could tell them over from memory, but my

tongue fails to pronounce the barbarous syllables. Would you like to have them in black and white?"

"Not this morning, monsieur," she answered, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Do you think I came to London in order to mix myself up in an unsuccessful rebellion? I, who have private affairs of my own that require all my attention. You might as well suppose I had followed yourself across the Channel because I could not exist apart from Casimir de Château-Guerrand! Frankly, I am glad to see you too. Very glad," she added, stretching her white hand to the young man, with another of her bewitching smiles. "But I must hunt you away now. Positively I must; I ought to have sold an estate, and touched the purchase-money by this time. I am a thorough woman of business, monsieur, I would have you know; which does not prevent my loving amusement at the right season, like other people."

He took his hat to depart, feeling, perhaps, for the first time, that there were women in the world to whom even he dare not aspire, and that it was provoking such should be the best worth winning. The marquise had not yet lost the knack of playing a game from which she had never risen a loser but once, and indeed if her weapons were a little less bright, her skill of fence was better than ever. Few women have thoroughly learned the art of man-taming till they are past their prime, and even then, perhaps the influence that subdued his fellows, is powerless alone on him whom most they wish to capture. Admiration from young Château-Guerrand gratified the marquise as some stray woodcock in a bag of a hundred head gratifies a sportsman. It hardly even stimulated her vanity. She wanted him though, like the woodcock, for ulterior purposes, and shot him, therefore, so to speak, gracefully, neatly, and in proper form.

"I should fear to commit an indiscretion by remaining one moment longer, madame," said he, "but—but"—and he looked longingly, though with less than his accustomed assurance, in the beautiful eyes that met his own so kindly.

"But—but"—she interposed, laughing, "you may come again to-morrow at the same time; I shall be alone. And, Casimir, I have some talent for curiosity; bring with you that list you spoke of—at least if no one else has seen it. A scandal, you know, is like a rose,—if I may not gather it fresh from the stalk, I had rather not wear it at all!"

"Honour," said he, kissing the hand she extended to him, and in high glee tripped downstairs to regain his chair in the street.

Satisfied with the implied promise, Madame de Montmirail looked wistfully at a clock on the chimneypiece and pondered.

"Twenty-four hours gained on that young man's gossiping tongue at least. To-morrow night I might be there—the horses are good in this country. I have it! When I near the place I must make use of their diligence. I shall overtake more than one. I cannot appear too quickly. I shall have a famous laugh at Malletort, to be sure, if my information is earlier than his—and at anyrate, I shall embrace my darling Cerise, and see her husband—my son-in-law now—my son-in-law! How strange it seems! Well, business first and pleasure afterwards."

"Justine!"

"Madame!" replied Justine, re-entering with a colour in her cheek and a few particles of soot, such as constitute an essential part of a London atmosphere, on her dainty forehead, denoting that she had been leaning out at window to look down the street. "Madame called, I think. Can I do anything more for madame before she goes out?"

Much to Justine's astonishment, she was directed to pack certain articles of wearing apparel without delay. These were to be ready in two hours' time. Was madame going again to voyage? That was no business of Justine's. Was Pierre not to accompany madame? nor Alphonse? nor even old Busson? If any of these were wanted, madame would herself let them know. And when was madame coming back? Shortly; Justine should learn in a day or two. So, without further parley, madame entered her chair and proceeded to that business which she imagined was the sole cause of her journey to London.

After some hesitation, and a few tiresome interviews with her intendant, the marquise had lately decided on selling her estates in the West Indies, stipulating only, for the sake of Célandine, that Bartoletti should be retained as overseer at Cash-a-crou. The locality, indeed, had but few agreeable associations connected with it. Months of wearisome exile, concluded by a night of bloodshed and horror, had not endeared Montmirail West in the eyes of its European owner. It is not now necessary to state that Madame de Montmirail was a lady of considerable enterprise, and especially affected all matters connected with business or speculation. In an hour she made up her mind that London was the best market for her property, and in twenty-four she was in her carriage, on the road to England. Much to her

intendant's admiration, she also expressed her decided intention of managing the whole negotiations herself. The quiet old Frenchman gratefully appreciated an independence of spirit that saved him long journeys, heavy responsibilities, and one or two of his mistress's sharpest rebukes.

To effect her sale, the preliminaries of which had been already arranged by letter, the marquise had to proceed as far as St. Margaret's Hill in the borough of Southwark. Her chairmen, after so long a trot, felt themselves doubtless entitled to refreshment, and took advantage of her protracted interview with the broker whom she visited, to adjourn to a neighbouring tavern for the purpose of recruiting their strength. The beer was so good that, returning past the old Admiralty Office, her leading bearer was compelled to sit down between the poles of his chair, taking off his hat, and proceeding to wipe his brows in a manner extremely ludicrous to the bystanders, and equally provoking to the inmate, who desired to be carried home. His yokefellow, instead of reproving him, burst into a drunken laugh, and the marquise inside, though half amused, was yet at the same time provoked to find herself placed in a thoroughly false position by so absurd a casualty.

She let down the window and expostulated, but with no result, except to collect a crowd, who expressed their sympathy with the usual good taste and kind feeling of a metropolitan mob. Madame de Montmirail's appearance denoted she was a highborn lady, and her accent proclaimed her a foreigner. The combination was irresistible; presently coarse jests and brutal laughter rose to hootings of derision, accompanied by ominous cries—"Down with the Pretender! No Popery! Who heated the warming-pan?" and such catchwords of political rancour and ill-will.

Ere long an apple or two began to fly, then a rotten egg, and the body of a dead cat, followed by a brickbat, while the less drunken chairman had his hat knocked over his eyes. That which began in horse-play was fast growing to a riot, and the marquise might have found herself roughly handled if it had not been for an irruption of seamen from a neighbouring tavern, who were whiling away their time by drinking strong liquors during the examination of their papers at the Admiralty Office, adjoining. Though not above half a dozen in number, they were soon "alongside the wreck," as they called it, making a lane through the crowd by the summary process of knocking down everybody who opposed them, but before they had time to give "three cheers for the

"Proceeding to wipe his brows"

lady," their leader, a sedate and weatherworn tar, who had never abandoned his pipe during the heat of the action, dropped it short from between his lips, and stood aghast before the chair window rolling his hat in his hands, speechless and spell-bound with amazement. The marquise recognised him at once.

"It is Smoke-Jack! and welcome!" she exclaimed. "I should know you amongst a thousand! Indeed, I scarcely wanted your assistance more the night you saved us at Cash-a-crou. Ah! I have not forgotten thé men of the *Bashful Maid*, nor how to speak to them. *Come, bear a hand, my hearty!* Is it not so?"

The little nautical slang spoken in her broken English, acted like a charm. Not a man but would have fought for her to the death, or drank her health till all was blue! They cheered lustily now, they crowded round in enthusiastic admiration, and the youngest of the party, with a forethought beyond all praise, rushed back to the tavern he had quitted, for a jorum of hot punch, in case the lady should feel faint after her accident.

Smoke-Jack's stoicism was for once put to flight.

"Say the word, marm!" exclaimed the old seaman, "and we'll pull the street down. Who began it?" he added, looking round and doubling his great brown fists. "Who began it?—that's all I want to know. Ain't nobody to be started for this here game? Ain't nobody to get his allowance? I'll give it him, hot and hot!"

With difficulty Smoke-Jack was persuaded that no benefit would accrue to the marquise from his doing immediate battle with the bystanders, consisting by this time of a few women and street-urchins, for most of the able-bodied rioters had slunk away before the threatening faces of the seamen. He had to content himself, therefore, with administering sundry kicks and cuffs to the chairmen, both of whom were too drunk to proceed, and with carrying the marquise home, in person, assisted by a certain elderly boatswain's mate, on whom he seemed to place some reliance, while the rest of the sailors sought their favourite resort once more, to drink success and a pleasant voyage to the lady, in the money with which she had liberally rewarded them.

"It is droll!" thought Madame de Montmirail, as she felt the chair jerk and sway to the unaccustomed action of its maritime bearers. "Droll enough to be thus carried through the streets of London by the British navy! and droller than all, that I should have met Smoke-Jack at a time like the present. This accident may prove extremely useful in the

end. Doubtless, he is still devoted to his old captain. Everybody seems devoted to that man. Can I wonder at my little Cerise? And Sir George may be none the worse of a faithful follower in days like these. I will ask him, at anyrate, and it is not often when I ask anything that I am refused!"

So when the chair halted at last before Madame de Montmirail's door, she dismissed the boatswain's mate delighted, with many kind words and a couple of broad pieces, while Smoke-Jack, no less delighted, found himself ushered into the sitting-room upstairs, even before he had time to look round and take his bearings. The marquise prided herself on knowledge of mankind, and offered him refreshment on the spot.

"Will you have grog?" she said. "It is bad for you sailors to talk with the mouth dry."

Smoke-Jack, again, prided himself on his manners, and declined strenuously. Neither would he be prevailed upon to sit down, but balanced his person on either leg alternately, holding his hat with both hands before the pit of his stomach.

"Smoke-Jack," said the marquise, "I know you of old; brave, discreet, and trustworthy. I am bound on a journey in which there is some little danger, and much necessity for caution; have you the time and the inclination to accompany me?"

His impulse was to follow her to the end of the world, but he mistrusted these sirens precisely because it *was* always his impulse so to follow them.

"Is it for a spell, marm?" he asked; "or for a long cruise? If I might make so free, marm, I'd like to be told the name of the skipper and the tonnage of the craft!"

"I start in an hour for the north," she continued, neither understanding nor heeding his proviso. "I am going into the neighbourhood of your old captain, Sir George Hamilton."

"Captain George!" exclaimed the seaman, with difficulty restraining himself from shying his hat to the ceiling, and looking sheepishly conscious, he had almost committed this tempting solecism. "What! *our* Captain George? I'm not much of a talking chap, marm; I haven't got the time, but if that's the port you're bound for, I'll sail round the world with you, if we beat against a headwind the whole voyage through!"

With such sentiments the preliminaries were easily adjusted, and it was arranged that Smoke-Jack should accompany the marquise on her journey with no more delay than would be required to purchase him landsman's attire. He entered into

the scheme with thorough goodwill, though expressing, and doubtless feeling, some little disappointment when he learned that Justine, of whom he had caught a glimpse on the stairs, was not to be of the party. Avowedly a woman-hater, he had, of course, a real weakness for the softer sex, and with all his deference to the marquise, would have found much delight in the society of her waiting-maid. Such specimens as Justine he considered his especial study, and believed that of all men he best understood their qualities, and was most conversant with " the trim on 'em."

CHAPTER LV

FOREWARNED

IT is needless to follow Madame de Montmirail and her new retainer through the different stages of their journey to the north. By dint of liberal pay, with some nautical eloquence on the part of Smoke-Jack, who, being a man of few words, spoke those few to the purpose, they overtook the "Flying-Post" Coach by noon of the second day at a town some fifteen miles south of Hamilton Hill. Calculating to arrive before nightfall, they here transferred themselves and their luggage to that lumbering conveyance; and if the marquise wished to avoid notice, such a measure was prudent enough. In the masked lady closely wrapped up and silent, who sat pre-occupied inside, no one could suspect the brilliant and sumptuous Frenchwoman, the beauty of two consecutive Courts. Nor, so long as he kept his mouth shut, did Smoke-Jack's seafaring character show through his shore-going disguise, consisting of jack-boots, three-cornered hat, scratch-wig, and long grey duffle greatcoat, in which he might have passed for a Quaker, but that the butt-end of a pistol peeped out of its side-pockets on each side.

Their fellow-passengers found their curiosity completely baffled by the haughty taciturnity of the one and the surly answers of the other. Even the ascent of Otterdale Scaur failed to elicit anything, although the rest of the freight alighted to walk up that steep and dangerous incline. In vain the ponderous coach creaked, and strained, and laboured; in vain driver flogged and guard expostulated; the lady inside was asleep, and must not be disturbed. Smoke-Jack, on the roof, swore that he had paid his passage, and would stick to the ship while a plank held. It was impossible to make anything satisfactory out of this strangely assorted couple, and the task was abandoned in despair long before the weary stretch of road had been traversed that led northward over the brown moorland past the door of the Hamilton Arms.

The lady was tired—the lady would alight. Though

their places were taken for several miles farther, she and her domestic would remain here. It was impossible she could proceed. Were these rooms vacant? Rooms vacant! Mrs. Dodge, in a pair of enormous earrings, with the gold cross glittering on her bosom, lifted her fat hands in protestation. Theoretically, she never had a corner to spare in which she could stow away a mouse; practically, she so contrived that no wealthy-looking traveller ran a risk by going farther of faring worse. On the present occasion "she was very full," she said. "Never was such markets; never was such a press of customers, calling here and calling there, and not to be served but with the best! Nevertheless, madam should have a room in five minutes! Alice, lay a fire in the Cedars. The room was warm and comfortable, but the lookout (into the stable-yard) hardly so airy as she could wish. Madam would excuse that—madam"— Here Mrs. Dodge, who was no fool, pulled herself short up. "She begged pardon. Her ladyship, she hoped, would find no complaints to make. She hoped her ladyship would be satisfied!"

Her ladyship simply motioned towards the staircase, up which Alice had run a moment before with a red-hot poker in her hand, and, preceded by Mrs. Dodge, retired to the apartment provided for her, while a roar of laughter, in a tone that seemed not entirely strange, reached her ears from the bar, into which her new retainer had just dragged her luggage from off the coach.

Now the marquise, though never before in England, was not yet ignorant of the general economy prevailing at the Hamilton Arms, or the position of its different apartments. She had still continued her correspondence with Malletort, or rather she had suffered him to write to her, as formerly, when he chose. His very last letter contained, amongst political gossip and protestations of friendship, a ludicrous description of his present lodgings, in which the very room she now occupied, opening through folding-doors into his own, was deplored as one of his many annoyances. Even had she not known his step, therefore, she would have had no difficulty in deciding that it was the abbé himself whom she now heard pacing the floor of the adjoining apartment, separated only by a thin deal door, painted to look like cedar-wood.

She was not given to hesitation. Trying the lock, she found it unfastened, and, taking off her travelling mask, opened the door noiselessly, to stand like a vision in the entrance, probably the very last person he expected to see.

Malletort was a difficult man to surprise. At least he

never betrayed any astonishment. With perfectly cool politeness he handed a chair, as if he had been awaiting her for an hour.

"Sit down, madame," said he, "I entreat you. The roads in this weather are execrable for travelling. You must have had a long and fatiguing journey."

She could not repress a laugh.

"It seems, then, that you expected me," she answered, accepting the proffered seat. "Perhaps you know why I have come."

"Without presumption," he replied, "I may be permitted to guess. Your charming daughter lives within half a league of this spot. You think of her day by day. You look on her picture at your château, which, by the way, is not too amusing a residence. You pine to embrace her. You fly on the wings of maternal love and tired post-horses. You arrive in due course, like a parcel. In short, here you are. Ah! what it is to have a mother's heart!"

She appreciated and admired his coolness. The man had a certain diplomatic kind of courage about him, and was worth saving, after all. How must he have suffered, too, this poor abbé in his gloomy hiding-place, with the insufferable cooking that she could smell even here!

"Abbé," she resumed, "I am serious, though you make me laugh. Listen. I did not come here to see my daughter, though I hope to embrace her this very night. More—I came to see *you*—to warn you that the sooner you leave this place the better. I know you too well to suppose you have not secured your retreat. Sound the *alerte*, my brave abbé, and strike your tents without delay. Your plot has failed—the whole thing has exploded—and I have travelled night and day to save a kinsman, and, I believe, as far as his nature permits, a friend! There is nothing more to be said on the subject."

Malletort was moved, but he would not show it any more than he would acknowledge this intelligence came upon him like a thunderclap. He fidgeted with some papers to hide his face for a moment, but looked up directly afterwards calm and clear as ever.

"I know—I know," said he. "I was prepared for this—though, perhaps, not quite so soon. I might have been prepared, too, for my cousin's kindness and self-devotion. She has always been the noblest and bravest of women. Madame, you have by this, as by many previous benefits, won my eternal gratitude. We shall be uninterrupted here, and

cannot be overheard. Detail to me the information that has reached you in the exact words used. I wish to see if it tallies with mine."

The marquise related her interview with young Château-Guerrand, adding several corroborative facts she had learned in the capital, none of which were of much importance apart, though, when taken together, they afforded strong evidence that the British Government was alive to the machinations of the abbé and his confederates.

"It is an utter rout," concluded the marquise contemptuously: "and there is no honour, as far as I can see, to save. Best turn bridle out of the press, abbé, like a defeated king in the old romances, put spurs to your horse, and never look over your shoulder on the field you have deserted!"

"Not quite so bad as that, madame," replied he. "'Tis but a leak sprung as yet, and we may, perhaps, make shift to get safe into port after all. In the meantime, I need scarcely remain in such absolute concealment any longer. It must be known in London that I am here. Once more, madame, accept my heartfelt thanks. When you see her this evening, commend me humbly to your beautiful daughter and to her husband, my old friend, the captain of musketeers."

So speaking, the abbé held open the door of communication and bowed the marquise into the adjoining room, where food and wine were served with all the ceremonious grace of the old Court. His brow was never smoother, his smile never more assured; but as soon as he found himself alone, he sat down at the writing-table and buried his face in his hands.

"So fair a scheme!" he muttered. "So deep! So well-arranged! And to fail at last like this! But what tools I have had to work with! What tools! What tools!"

Meantime two honest voices in the bar were pealing louder and louder in joyous interchange of questions, congratulations, and entreaties to drink. The shouts of laughter that had reached the marquise at the top of the stairs came from no less powerful lungs than those of Slap-Jack, who had stolen down from the Hill as usual for the hindrance of Alice in her household duties. He was leaning over her chair, probably to assist her in mending the house linen, when his occupation was interrupted by the arrival of a tall, dried-up looking personage dressed in a long duffle coat, who entered the sanctum with a valise and other luggage in his hands. Something in the ship-shape accuracy with which he disposed of these roused Slap-Jack's professional attention, and when the stranger turning round pushed his hat off his

forehead, and shut one eye to have a good look, recognition on both sides was instantaneous and complete.

"Why, Alice, it's Smoke-Jack!" exclaimed her sweetheart, while volumes would have failed to express more of delight and astonishment than the new-comer conveyed in the simple ejaculation, "Well! blow me!"

A bowl of punch was ordered, and pipes were lit forthwith, Alice filling her lover's coquettishly, and applying a match to it with her own pretty fingers. Smoke-Jack looked on approvingly, and winked several times in succession. Mentally he was scanning the damsel with a critical eye, her bows, her run, her figure-head, her tackle, and the trim of her generally. When the punch came he filled three glasses to the brim, and observed with great solemnity—

"My sarvice to you, shipmate, and your consort. The sooner you two gets spliced the better. No offence, young woman. If I'd ever come across such a craft as yourn, mate, I'd have been spliced myself. But these here doesn't swim to windward in shoals like black fish, and I was never a chap to take and leap overboard promiscuous after a blessed mermyed a-cause she hailed me off a reef. That's why I'm a-driftin' to leeward this day. I'll take it as a favour, young woman, if you'll sip from my glass!"

This was the longest speech Slap-Jack ever remembered from his shipmate, and was valued accordingly. It was obvious that Smoke-Jack, contrary to his usual principles, which were anti-matrimonial, looked on his old friend's projected alliance with the utmost favour. The three found themselves extremely pleasant company. Alice, indeed, moved in and out on her household duties, rendered the more engrossing that her aunt was occupied in the kitchen, but the two seamen stuck to the lee side of their bowl of punch till it was emptied, and never ceased smoking the whole time. They had so much to talk about, so many old stories to recall, questions to ask, and details to furnish on their own different fortunes since they met, to say nothing of the toasts that accompanied each separate glass. They drank the *Bashful Maid* twice, and Alice three times, in the course of their merry-making. Now it came to pass that during their conversation the name of Captain Bold was mentioned by Slap-Jack, as an individual whose head it would give him extreme gratification to punch on some fitting occasion; and that his friend showed some special interest in the subject appeared by the cock of his eye and the removal of his pipe from between his lips.

"Bold!" repeated Smoke-Jack, as if taxing his memory. "Captain Bold you calls him. Not a real skipper, but only a soger captain, belike?"

"Not even good enough for a soger to my thinking," answered the other, in a tone of disgust. "Look ye here, brother, I've heard some of the old hands say, though, mind ye, I doesn't go along with them, that sogers is like onions, never looks so well as when you hangs them up in a string. But this here captain's not even good enough for hanging, though he'll come to the yardarm at last, or I'm mistaken."

Again Smoke-Jack pondered, and took a pull at his punch.

"A flaxen-haired chap," inquired he, "with a red nose and a pair of cunning eyes. As thirsty as a sandbank, and hails ye in a voice like the boatswain's whistle?"

"That's about the trim, all but the hair," answered his friend. "To be sure, he may have hoisted a wig. This beggar's got the gift of the gab, though, and pays ye out a yarn as long as the maintop bowline."

"It *must* be the same," said Smoke-Jack, and proceeded to relate his grievances, which were as follows:—

Paid off from a cruise, and finding he was pretty well to do in the world, Smoke-Jack had resolved to amuse himself in London, by studying life in a more enlarged phase than was afforded at his usual haunts near the river-side. For this purpose he had dressed himself in a grave suit, which made him look like some retired merchant captain, and in that character frequented the more respectable ordinaries about the Savoy and such civilised parts of the town. Here he made casual acquaintances, chiefly of sedate exterior, especially affecting those who assumed a wise port and talked heavy nonsense in the guise of philosophy. Not many weeks ago he had met a person at one of these dinner-tables with whose conversation he was much delighted. Flaxen-haired, dark-eyed, red-nosed, with a high voice, and of *quasi*-military appearance, but seeming to be well versed in a spurious kind of science, and full of such grave saws and aphorisms as made a deep impression on a man like Smoke-Jack, reflective, uneducated, and craving for intellectual excitement. That he could not understand half the captain said did but add to the charm of that worthy's discourse, and for two days the pair were inseparable. On the third they concluded a dry argument on fluids with the appropriate termination of a debauch, and the landsman drugged the sailor's liquor, so as to rob him of his purse, containing twenty-five broad pieces, with the utmost

facility, whilst he slept. Waking and finding his companion and his money gone, while the score was left unpaid, Smoke-Jack remembered to have seen the captain stroke the neck of a bay mare held by a boy at the door of the tavern they entered, though he denied all knowledge of the animal. After this the sailor never expected to set eyes on his scientific friend again.

The mention of the bay mare proved beyond a doubt that the two shipmates owed a grudge to the same individual. They laid their heads together to pay it off accordingly, and called Alice, who was nowise unwilling, into council.

Her feminine aversion to violence dissuaded them from their first intention of avenging their grievances by the strong hand.

"It's far better that such boasters as the captain should be frightened than hurt," observed gentle Alice. "If I'd my way, he should be well scared once for all, like a naughty child, and then perhaps he'd never come here any more."

Smoke-Jack listened as if spell-bound to hear a woman speak so wisely; but her sweetheart objected—

"It's not so easy to frighten a man, Alice. I don't quite see my bearings how to set about it."

"He's not like you, dear," answered Alice, with a loving smile, and showing some insight into the nature of true courage. "It would be easy enough to scare him, for I've heard him say many a time he feared neither man nor devil, and if Satan himself was to come across him, he'd turn him round and catch him by the tail."

"I should like to see them grapple-to!" exclaimed both seamen simultaneously.

"Well," answered Alice, in her quiet voice, "old Robin skinned our black bullock only yesterday. Hide, and horns, and tail are all together in the corner of the cow-house now. I'm sure I quite shuddered when I went by. It's an ugly sight enough, and I'm very much mistaken if it wouldn't frighten a braver man than Captain Bold!"

CHAPTER LVI

FOREARMED

NOTWITHSTANDING the excitement under which she laboured, and the emotion she painfully though contemptuously kept down, Madame de Montmirail could not but smile at the unpretending mode in which she reached her daughter's new home. Slap-Jack, leading an old pony, that did all the odd work of the Hamilton Arms, and that now swayed from side to side under the traveller's heavy valises, showed the way across the moor, while the marquise, on a pillion, sat behind Smoke-Jack, who, by no means at home in the position, bestrode a stamping cart-horse with unexampled tenacity, and followed his shipmate with perhaps more circumspection, and certainly less confidence than if he had been steering the brigantine through shoal-water in a fog. He was by no means the least rejoiced of the three to "make the lights" that twinkled in the hospitable windows of Hamilton Hill.

It is needless to enlarge on the reception of so honoured a guest as Lady Hamilton's mother, or the delighted welcome, the affectionate inquiries, the bustle of preparation, the running to and fro of servants, the tight embrace of Cerise, the cordial greeting of Sir George, the courteous salute of Florian, and the strange restraint that, after the first demonstrative warmth had evaporated, seemed to lour like a cloud over the whole party. Under pretext of the guest's fatigue, all retired earlier than usual to their apartments; yet long before they broke up for the night the quick perception of the marquise warned her something was wrong, and this because she read Sir George's face with a keener eye than scanned even her daughter's. How handsome he looked, she thought, standing stately in the doorway of his hall, to greet her with the frank manly courtesy of which she knew the charm so well. Yes, Cerise was indeed a lucky girl! and could she be unworthy of her happiness? Could she have mismanaged or trifled with it? This was always the way. Those who possessed

the treasure never seemed to appreciate its worth. Ah! It was a strange world! She had hoped Cerise would be so happy! And now—and now! Could the great sacrifice have been indeed offered up in vain? Cerise was a good girl too; so kind, so truthful, so affectionate. Yet in the present instance, if a shadow had really come between husband and wife, Cerise must be in the wrong!

Women generally argue thus when they adjudicate for the sexes. In the absence of proof they almost invariably assume that their own is in fault. Perhaps they decide from internal evidence, and know best.

Lady Hamilton accompanied the marquise to her bedroom, where mother and daughter found themselves together again as they used to be in the old days. It was not quite the same thing now. Neither could tell why, yet both were conscious of the different relation in which they stood to each other. It was but a question of perspective after all. Formerly the one looked up, the other down. Now they occupied the dead level of a common experience, and the mother felt her child was in leading-strings no more.

Then came the old story; the affectionate fencing-match, wherein one tries to obtain a full and free confession without asking a single direct question, while the other assumes an appearance of extreme candour, to cover profound and impenetrable reserve. The marquise had never loved her child so little as when the latter took leave of her for the night, having seen with her own eyes to every appliance for her mother's comfort, combining gracefully and fondly the solicitude of a hostess with the affectionate care of a daughter; and Lady Hamilton, seeking her own room, with a pale face and a heavy heart, wondered she could feel so little inspirited by dear mamma's arrival, and acknowledged with a sigh that the bloom was gone from everything in life, and the world had grown dull and dreary since this cold shadow came between her and George.

He alone seemed satisfied with the turn affairs had taken. There need be no more hesitation now, and it was well to know the worst. Sir George's demeanour always became the more composed the nearer he approached a disagreeable necessity. Though Madame de Montmirail's arrival had exceedingly startled him, as in the last degree unexpected, he received her with his customary cordial hospitality. Though he had detected, as he believed, a deliberate falsehood, told him for the first time by the wife of his bosom, he in no way altered the reserved, yet good-humoured kindness of manner

with which he forced himself to accost her of late. Though he had discovered, as he thought, a scheme of black and unpardonable treachery on the part of his friend, he could still afford the culprit that refuge which was only to be found in his protection; could treat him with the consideration due to everyone beneath his own roof.

But none the more for this did Sir George propose to sit down patiently under his injuries. I fear the temper cherished by this retired captain of musketeers savoured rather of a duellist's politeness than a philosopher's contempt, or the forgiveness of a Christian. When he sought his chamber that night, the chamber in which stood the unfinished model of his brigantine, and from the window of which he had watched his wife and Florian on the terrace, there was an evil smile round his lips, denoting that thirst of all others the most insatiable, the thirst for blood. He went calmly through the incidents of the past day, as a man adds up a sum, and the wicked smile never left his face. Again he saw his wife's white dress among the roses, and her graceful figure bending over the flower-beds, with that pale dark-eyed priest. Every look of both, every gesture, seemed stamped in fire on his brain. He remembered the eagerness with which she brought out her packet and confided it to the Jesuit. He had not forgotten the cold, haughty tone in which she told him — *him*—her husband, who perhaps had some little right to inquire, that it contained letters for her mother in France. In France! And that very night her mother appears at his own house in the heart of Great Britain!

He shuddered in a kind of pity to think of his own Cerise descending to so petty a shift. Poor Cerise! Perhaps, after all, this coquetry was bred in her, and she could not help it. She was her mother's own daughter, that was all. He remembered there used to be strange stories about the marquise in Paris, and he himself, if he had chosen—well, it was all over now; but he ought never to have entrusted his happiness to *that* family. Of course if a married woman was a thorough coquette, as a Montmirail seemed sure to be, she must screen herself with a lie! It was contemptible, and he only despised her!

But was nobody to be punished for all the annoyances thus thrust upon himself; the disgrace that had thus overtaken his house? The smile deepened and hardened now, while he took down a glittering rapier from the wall, and examined blade and hilt carefully, bending the weapon and proving its temper against the floor.

His mind was made up what to do, and to-morrow he would set about his task. So long as Florian remained under his roof, he argued, the rights of hospitality required that a host should be answerable for his guest's safety. Nay, more, he would never forgive himself if, from any undue haste or eagerness of his own, the satisfaction should elude him of avenging his dishonour for himself. What gratification would it be to see the Jesuit hanged by the neck on Tower Hill? No, no. His old comrade and lieutenant should die a fairer death than that. Die like a soldier, on his back, with an honourable man's sword through his heart. But how if it came about the other way? Florian's was a good blade, the best his own had ever crossed. He flourished his wrist involuntarily, remembering that deadly disengagement which had run poor Flanconnade through the body, and was the despair of every scientific fencer in the company. What if it should be his own lot to fall? Well, at least, he would have taken no advantage, he would have fought fair all through, and Cerise, in the true spirit of coquetry, would love him very dearly when she found she was never to see him again.

He resolved, therefore, that he and Florian should depart forthwith. His own character for loyalty stood so high, his intimacy with Sir Marmaduke Umpleby and other gentlemen in authority was so well known, that he anticipated no danger of discovery to anyone who travelled under his protection. Monsieur St. Croix should simply assume the ordinary dress of a layman; they would not even ride on horseback. Every precaution should be taken to avoid notice, and the "Flying-Post" Coach, with its interminable crawl, and innumerable delays, would probably answer the purpose of unpretending secrecy better than any other mode of conveyance, especially when they approached London. Thence, without delay, they would post to the sea-board, charter a fast-sailing lugger, and so proceed in safety to the coast of France. Once there, they would be on equal terms, and no power on earth should come between them then. He liked to think of the level sand, the grey sky overhead, the solitary shore, the moaning wave, not a soul in sight or hearing but his enemy, and his own point within six inches of that enemy's throat!

Sir George's night was disturbed and restless, but he slept sound towards morning, as he had accustomed himself in his former life to sleep at any given time, after he had placed his sentries on an outpost, or gone below to his cabin for an hour's rest while giving chase to a prize. When he awoke a cold grey sky loured overhead, and a light fall of

snow sprinkled the ground. It was the first morning of winter, come earlier than usual even to those bleak moorlands, and strange to say, a foolish, hankering pity for Lady Hamilton's roses was the feeling uppermost in his mind while he looked gloomily out upon the terrace.

"Poor Cerise!" he muttered. "Bleak sky and withered flowers — lover and husband both gone by this time to-morrow! She will be lonely at first, no doubt, and it is fortunate her mother should have arrived last night. But she will console herself. They always do. Ah! these women, these women! That a man should ever be such an idiot as to entrust his honour. Psha! his honour has nothing to do with it—his happiness, nay, his mere comfort in their hands. There is something even ludicrous in the infatuation. It reminds me of Madame Parabére's monkey playing with the Regent's porcelain flower-basket! — a laugh, a chatter, a stealthy glance or two, and down goes the basket. What does it matter? They are all alike, I suppose, and cannot help themselves. A man's dog is faithful, his horse is honest, his very hawk stoops to no lure but her master's, while his wife. And I loved her—I loved her. Fool that I am, I love her still! By the faith of a gentleman, Monsieur de St. Croix, you will need every trick of the trade to keep my point off your body if I once get you within distance!"

Then Sir George descended to meet his guest with a quiet manner and an unclouded brow, though the murderous smile still hovered about his mouth.

"Florian," said he, "do not condemn my hospitality if I announce that you must depart this evening. Hamilton Hill is no longer a sure refuge, though I believe that my company can still afford you protection—therefore I travel with you. I do not leave you till I see you landed in France. Till I have placed you in safety it concerns my honour that you should be my care. But not a moment longer—not a moment longer, remember that! You had better walk quietly down to the Hamilton Arms during the day. I will follow with your luggage and my own. We shall proceed to London in the weekly coach, which passes southward to-night. We can be across the water by the fifth day. Do you understand? The fifth day. You must be well armed. Take any sword of mine that pleases you, only be sure you choose one with two feet six inches of blade, and not too pliant; you might meet with an adversary who uses brute force rather than skill. A strong arm drives a stiff blade home. In the meantime I recommend you to make your farewell

compliments at once to the marquise and — and Lady Hamilton."

Florian assented, confused and stupefied like one in a dream. The hour he had expected was come at last, and seemed none the more welcome for his expectation. He must go — must leave the woman he worshipped, and the man whom, strange to say, he loved as a brother, though that woman's husband. His senses seemed numbed, and he felt that to-day he could scarcely appreciate his desolate condition. To-morrow it would not matter. There was no to-morrow for him. Henceforth everything would be a blank. What was it Sir George had said about a sword? Ah! the weapon might prove his best friend. One home-thrust would put an end to all his sufferings. His heart was dead within him, but he would see Cerise once more before he left. A quick sharp pang warned him that his heart was not yet paralysed, when he reflected how the marquise was here, and he would not, therefore, see Lady Hamilton alone.

But Cerise, pitiful, perhaps, because of her own sorrow, met him by one of those accidents that are essentially feminine, as he traversed the hall, booted and cloaked for his departure. She gave him her hand kindly, and he pressed it to his lips. He knew then, while she passed on, that never in this world was he to set eyes on her again. The door clanged to, the wind moaned, the crisp brown leaves eddied round his feet on the frozen path, the cold struck to his very heart. How dreary looked the white outline of those swelling moors against the black laden clouds that scowled behind the hill.

But Sir George was careful to avoid an uninterrupted interview with his wife. He shut himself into his own apartment, and found the time pass quicker than he expected, for he had many dispositions to make, many affairs of business to arrange. If he came alive out of that prospective conflict, he meant to be absent from England for an indefinite period. Come what might, he would never see Cerise again. Not that he believed her guilty—no, he said to himself, a thousand times, but she was as bad as guilty — she had deceived him—she could never have loved him. It was all over. There was nothing more to be said.

The early night began to close ere his last pile of papers was burned, his last packet sealed. Then Sir George took the compromising list of his friends and neighbours with which Florian had entrusted him, and placed it carefully in his breast. It might be an effective weapon, he thought, if

the Jesuit should prove restive about leaving England, or if he himself should meet with opposition from any of the confederates. A brace of pistols were now to be loaded and disposed in the large pockets of his riding-coat, the trusty rapier to be buckled on, hat, gloves, and cloak to be placed on the hall-table, Slap-Jack summoned to be in readiness with the luggage, and Sir George was prepared for his journey.

Not till these arrangements were made did he seek Lady Hamilton's withdrawing-room, where, perhaps to his disappointment, he found the marquise alone. His wife, however, soon entered, and accosted him with a very wife-like inquiry—

"Have you had no dinner, George? and before travelling, too? We would have waited, but the servants said you had given orders not to be disturbed."

"Sleep is food," observed the marquise. "I believe you have been preparing for your journey with a *siesta*?"

How homelike and comfortable looked the pretty room, with its blazing fire and its beautiful occupants! And perhaps he was never to see it again; was certainly never again to hear the voice he loved in that endearing and familiar tone. But he would not pain his wife even now. As far as he could spare her she should be spared. They must not part on any terms but those of kindness and goodwill. He drew her towards his chair and called her by her Christian name.

"I would have dined with you, indeed, but I had not a moment to bestow," said he, "and the marquise will excuse ceremony in such a family party as ours. You will take care of Cerise, madame, when I am gone? I know I can trust her safely with you."

The tears were standing in Lady Hamilton's eyes, and she bent her face towards her husband.

"You will come back soon, George?" said she in a broken voice. "London is not so far. Promise me you will only be a week away."

He drew her down and kissed her, once, twice, fondly, passionately, but answered not a word. Then he took leave of the marquise with something less than his usual composure, which she did not fail to remark, and notwithstanding a certain delay in the hall, of which Cerise tried in vain to take advantage for another embrace, he summoned Slap-Jack and departed.

"My head must be going," thought Sir George, as he

walked with his old foretop-man across the frozen park. "I could have sworn I put both gloves on the hall-table with my hat. Never mind, I have *one* left at least for Monsieur de St. Croix to take up. Five days more—only five days more! and then"—

Slap-Jack, looking into his master's face under the failing light, saw something there that strangely reminded him of the night when the captain of the *Bashful Maid* passed his sword through Hippolyte's black body at Cash-a-crou.

CHAPTER LVII

AN ADDLED EGG

"GO ahead, Jack!" said the baronet, after they had crunched the frozen snow in silence for a quarter of a mile. "See that everything is ready, and secure a couple of berths in the 'Weekly Dispatch,' or whatever they call that lumbering 'Flying-Post' Coach's consort, for the whole trip. I'll be down directly."

"For you and me, Sir George?" asked Slap-Jack, exhilarated by the prospect of a voyage to London. "Deck passengers, both, if I may be so bold? The fore-hold of a slaver's a joke to them London coaches between decks."

"Do as you're ordered," answered his master, "and be smart about it. Keep your tongue between your teeth, and wait at the Hamilton Arms till I come."

Sir George was obviously disinclined for conversation, and Slap-Jack hastened on forthwith, delighted to have an hour or two of leisure in his favourite resort, for reasons which will hereafter appear.

No sooner was his servant out of sight than the baronet retraced his steps, and took up a position under some yew-trees, so as to be completely screened from observation. Hence he could watch the door opening on his wife's garden, and the windows of the gallery, already lighted, which she must traverse to reach her own room. It was a pitiful weakness, he thought, but it could do no harm just to see her shadow pass once more for the last, last time!

Meanwhile Slap-Jack, arriving all in a glow at the Hamilton Arms, found that hostelry in a great state of turmoil and confusion; the stables were full of horses, the parlours were crowded with guests, even the bar was thronged with comers and goers, most of whom had a compliment to

spare for mistress Alice. It was some minutes before she could find an opportunity of speaking to him, but the whisper must have been ludicrous as well as affectionate, for her sweetheart burst out laughing, and exploded again at intervals, while he sat with Smoke-Jack over a cup of ale in the tap.

The two shipmates adjourned presently to the stable, where they were followed by Alice, with a lanthorn, an armful of waxed twine, and a large needle, furnished by the elder seaman, such as is used for thrumming sails. Their occupation seemed to afford amusement, for they laughed so much as greatly to endanger the secrecy enjoined by their feminine assistant, who was so pleased with its progress that she returned to visit them more than once from her avocations in the bar.

The press of company to-night at the Hamilton Arms consisted of a very different class from the usual run of its customers; the horses in the stable were well-bred, valuable animals, little inferior in quality to Captain Bold's bay mare herself; the guests, though plainly dressed, were of a bearing that seemed at once to extinguish the captain's claims to consideration, and caused him to slink about in a very unassuming manner till he had fortified his failing audacity with strong drink. They threw silver to old Robin the ostler, and called for measures of claret or burnt sack with an unostentatious liberality that denoted habits of affluence, while their thoughtful faces and intellectual features seemed strangely at variance with the interest they displayed in the projected cock-fight, which was their ostensible cause of gathering. A match for fifty broad pieces a-side need scarcely have elicited such eager looks, such anxious whispers, such restless, quivering gestures, above all, such morbid anxiety for the latest news from the capital. They wore their swords, in which there was nothing remarkable, but every man was also provided with a brace of pistols, carried on his person, as though loth to trust the insecurity of saddle-holsters.

Malletort walked about from one to the other like the presiding genius of the commotion. For these he had a jest, for those a secret, for all a word of encouragement, a smile of approval; and yet busy as he was, he never took his eye off Florian, watching him as one watches a wild animal caught in a snare, too weak to ensure its capture, and likely to break with every struggle. Without appearing to do so, the abbé had counted over the guests and found their number complete.

"Gentlemen," said he, in a loud, open voice, "I have laid out pen and ink in the Cedars, as my poor apartment is loftily entitled. If you will honour me so far, I propose that we now adjourn to that chamber, and there draw out the conditions of our match!"

Every man of them knew he had a halter round his neck, and the majority were long past the flush of youth, yet they scuffled upstairs, and played each other practical jokes, like schoolboys, as they shouldered through the narrow doorway into the room. Malletort, signing to Captain Bold, and taking Florian's arm, brought up the rear.

"How now, Mrs. Dodge?" he called out, as he crossed the threshold. "I ordered a fire to be lighted. What have you been about?"

"Alice must be sent for! Alice had been told! Alice had forgotten! How careless of Alice!"

And Mrs. Dodge, in the presence of such eligible customers, really felt much of the sorrow she expressed for her niece's thoughtlessness. When Alice did arrive to light the fire, her candle went out, her paper refused to catch, her sticks to burn; altogether, she put off so much time about the job, that, despite her good looks, the meeting lost patience, and resolved to go to business at once; Captain Bold, who had recovered his impudence, remarking that, "If what he heard from London was true, some of them would have warm work enough now before all was done!"

The captain seemed a privileged person: all eyes turned on him anxiously, while several eager voices asked at once—

"What more have you heard?"

Bold looked to the abbé for permission, and on a sign from whom, Bold handed him a letter, which Malletort retained unopened in his hand. Sensations of excitement, and even apprehension, now obviously pervaded the assembly. Rumours had as usual mysteriously flown ahead of the real intelligence they were about to learn, and men looked in each other's faces, for the encouragement they desired, in vain.

"Gentlemen," said the abbé, taking his place at the table, and motioning the others to be seated whilst he remained standing, "if I fail to express myself as clearly as I should wish, I pray you attribute my shortcomings to a foreign idiom, and an ignorance of your expressive language, rather than to any doubt or hesitation existing in my own mind as to our line of conduct in the present crisis. I will not conceal from you—why should I conceal from you—nay, how *can* I conceal from you, that the moment of action has now arrived? I look

around me, and I see on every countenance but one expression, a noble and courageous anxiety to begin."

Murmurs of applause went through the apartment, while two or three voices exclaimed, "Hear! hear!" "Well said!" "Go on!"

"Yes, gentlemen," resumed the abbé, "the moment has at last arrived, the pear is ripe, and has dropped off the wall from its own weight. The first shot, so to speak, has been fired by the enemy. It is the signal for attack. Gentlemen, I have advices here, informing me that the Bishop of Rochester has been arrested, and is now imprisoned in the Tower."

His listeners rose to a man, some even seizing their hats, and drawing the buckles of their sword-belts, as if under an irresistible impulse to be off. One by one, however, they sat down again, with the same wistful and even ludicrous expression of shame on the countenance of each, like a pack of foxhounds that have been running hare. The reaction did not escape Malletort, who was now in his element.

"I should have been unworthy of your confidence, gentlemen," he proceeded, with something of triumph in his tone, "had such a blow as this fallen and found me unprepared. I was aware it had been meditated, I was even aware that it had been resolved on, and although the moment of execution could only be known to the Government, I learned enough yesterday to impress on me the policy of calling together this influential meeting to-night. Our emissary, Captain Bold, here, will tell you that the intelligence had only reached his colleague at the next post two hours ago, though it travelled from London as fast as your English horses can gallop and your English couriers can ride. It must be apparent to every gentleman here that not another moment should be lost. My lord, I will ask your lordship to read over the resolutions as revised and agreed to at our last meeting."

He bowed low to an elderly and aristocratic-looking personage, who, taking a paper from the abbé's hands, proceeded somewhat nervously to read aloud as follows:—

"Resolved—No. 1. That this Meeting do constitute itself a Committee of Direction for the re-establishment of public safety, by authority of His Majesty King James III., as authorised under his hand and seal.

"No. 2. That the noblemen and gentlemen whose signatures are attached to the document annexed, do pledge themselves to act with zeal, secrecy, and unanimity, for the furtherance of the sacred object declared above.

"No. 3. That for this purpose the oath be administered, jointly and severally, as agreed.

"No. 4. That the person now officially in correspondence with His Majesty's well-wishers in Artois be appointed Secretary to the Committee, with full powers, as detailed under the head of Secret Instructions for Committee of Safety, No. 7.

"No. 5. That the Secretary be authorised in all cases of emergency to call a meeting of the entire Committee at his discretion."

His lordship here paused to take breath, and Malletort again struck in.

"By authority of that resolution, I have called you together to-night. I cannot conceive it possible that there is present here one dissentient to our great principle of immediate action. Immediate, because thus only simultaneous. At the same time, if any nobleman or gentleman at this table has a suggestion to make, let him now submit his views to the meeting."

Several heads were bent towards each other, and a good deal of conversation took place in whispers, ere a stout, good-humoured-looking man, constituting himself a mouthpiece for the rest, observed bluntly—

"Tell us your plan, Mr. Secretary, and we'll answer at once. Not one of us is afraid of a leap in the dark, or we should scarcely be here now; but there is no harm in taking a look whilst we can!"

A murmur of applause denoted the concurrence of the majority in this prudent remark, and Malletort, still with his eye on Florian, rose once more to address them.

"I need not recapitulate to this meeting, and especially to you, Sir Rupert (saluting the last speaker), all the details set forth in those secret instructions of which each man present has a copy. The invasion from the Continent will take place on the appointed day, but with this additional assurance of success, that three thousand Irish troops are promised from a quarter on which we can implicitly rely. His lordship here, as you are aware, following the instincts of his illustrious line, assumes the post of honour and the post of danger amongst us in the north, by placing himself at the head of a loyal and enthusiastic multitude, only waiting his signal to take up arms. You, Sir Rupert, have pledged yourself and your dalesmen to overawe the Whigs and Puritans of the east. Other gentlemen, now listening to me, are prepared to bring their several troops of an irregular, but highly efficient

cavalry, into the field. To you, who are all intimately acquainted with our military dispositions, I need not insist on the certainty of success. Let each man read over his secret instructions and judge for himself. But, gentlemen, the scheme of a campaign on a grand scale is not all with which we have to occupy ourselves. Something more than a military triumph, something more than a victorious battle is indispensable to our complete success. And I need not remind you that there is no compromise between complete success and irremediable disaster. It is an unavoidable choice between St. James's Palace and Temple Bar. I now come to the germ of the undertaking—the essence of the whole movement—the keystone of that bridge we must all pass over to reach the wished-for shore. I allude to the suppression of the Usurper and the fall of the House of Hanover."

A stir, almost a shudder, went through the assemblage. Men looked askance at the papers on the table, the buckles of their sword-belts, the spur-leathers on their boots, anything rather than betray to their neighbours either too eager an apprehension of the abbé's meaning, or too cold an approval of his object. He was speaking high treason with a vengeance, and the one might place them in too dangerous a prominence, while the other might draw down the equally dangerous mistrust of their fellow-conspirators. Malletort knew well what was passing in his hearers' minds, but he never expected to get the iron hotter than it was to-night, and he struck at it with his whole force.

"The arrangements for our great blow," said he, "have been confided to a few zealous loyalists, with whose plans, as your Secretary, I have been made acquainted. In five days from the present, King George, as he is still called, returns to Kensington. He will arrive at the palace about dusk. What do I say? He will never arrive there at all! Captain Bold here, whom I have had the honour to present to this meeting, has organised a small body of his old comrades, men of tried bravery and broken fortunes, who are pledged to possess themselves of the Usurper's person. His guard will be easily overpowered, for it will be outnumbered three to one. The titular Prince of Wales and his children will at the same time be made prisoners, and the chief officers of state secured, if possible without bloodshed. Such a bold stroke, combined with a simultaneous rising here in the north, cannot but ensure success. It is for you, gentlemen, to assemble your followers, to hold yourselves in readiness, and trusting implicitly to the co-operation of your friends in

London, to declare on the same day for His Majesty King James III.!"

The enthusiasm Malletort contrived to fling into his last sentence caught like wildfire.

"Long live James the Third!"—"Down with the Whigs!" exclaimed several of his listeners; and Sir Rupert flung his hat to the low ceiling ere he placed it on his head, as if preparing to depart; but the tall figure of the elderly nobleman, as he rose from his chair, seemed to dominate the tumult, and every syllable was distinctly audible, while he inquired, gravely—

"Can this be accomplished without violence to the person of him whom we deem a usurper?"

Only the narrowest observers could have detected the sneer round Malletort's mouth, while he replied—

"Certainly, my lord!—certainly! With as little personal violence as is possible when armed men are fighting round a king in the dark! My lord, if you please, we will now pass on to a few trifling matters of finance, after which I need detain the meeting no longer."

The meeting, as usual, was only too happy to be dissolved. In less than ten minutes hats and cloaks were assumed, reckonings paid, horses led out from the stable, and riders, with anxious hearts, diverging by twos and threes on their homeward tracks. There was no question, however, about the cock-fight which was supposed to have called these gentlemen together. Malletort, Florian, and Captain Bold remained in the Cedars. The two priests seemed anxious, thoughtful, and preoccupied; but the captain's eye twinkled with sly glances of triumphant vanity, and he appeared extremely self-satisfied, though a little fidgety, and anxious for his employer to leave the room.

CHAPTER LVIII

HORNS AND HOOFS

"THERE is nothing but the Declaration to be provided for now," observed Malletort, after a pause. "You had better give it me back, Florian, even without Sir George's name subscribed. He is a man of mettle, and will be in the saddle as soon as he hears steel and stirrup ring."

Although the abbé did not fail to observe how strange an alteration had to-day come over his young friend's manner, he simply attributed it to the qualms of conscience which are often so embarrassing to beginners in the science of deception, but which, as far as his own experience served him, he had found invariably disappeared with a little practice. He never doubted that Florian was equally interested with himself in the success of their undertaking, though for different reasons. He attributed only to nervousness, anxiety, and a foolish hankering after Lady Hamilton, the wildness of the young priest's dark eye—the fixed spot of colour in his cheek, lately so pale and wan—the resolute expression of his feminine mouth, denoting some desperate intention—and the general air of abstraction that showed as well unconsciousness of the present as recklessness of the future into which he seemed to project his whole being. The abbé simply expected that Florian would place his hand in his bosom and bring out the roll of paper required. He was surprised, therefore, to receive no answer; and repeated, hastily, for he had still a press of business to get through—

"The manifesto, my friend—quick! It must be retained in my care till it is printed!"

Florian woke up from a brown study, and looked vacantly around.

"It is still in Sir George's hands," said he. "I believe I have asked him for it more than once, but I could not get it back."

"In Sir George's hands!" repeated the abbé, almost losing patience, "and without Sir George's signature! Do you know

what you are saying? Florian, listen, man, and look up. Are you awake?"

The other passed his hand wearily across his brow.

"I have slept little of late," was all he answered. "It is as I tell you."

Even Captain Bold could not but admire the abbé's self-control, that kept down the impatience naturally resulting from such a confession, so composedly announced. He mused for a moment with his peculiar smile, and observed quietly—

"You travel to London to-night, I believe, and you travel together?"

Florian only bowed his head in reply.

"I wish you a pleasant journey," continued the abbé. "Had you not better go now and make the necessary preparations?"

Then, as soon as the door closed on Florian, who walked out dejectedly, without another word, he grasped Captain Bold's arm, and laughed a low, mocking laugh.

"Business increases, captain," said he. "Yours is a trade sure to thrive, for its occasions come up fresh every day. Did you hear that Sir George Hamilton possesses a paper I require? and that he proceeds to London to-night?"

"I heard it," answered the captain doggedly.

He, too, knew something of Sir George, and did not much relish the job which he began to suspect was provided for him.

"That paper must be in my hands before daybreak," continued the abbé, speaking in such low, distinct accents as his emissary had already learned admitted of no appeal. "You will name your own price, Captain Bold, and you will bring me what I require—as little blood on it as possible—at least two hours before dawn."

The captain pondered, and his face fell.

"Do you know how Sir George travels?" said he, in his high, quavering voice, more tremulous than its wont. "There has been such a press of work lately that I am rather short both of men and horses. If he takes anything like a following with him it might come to a coil; and such jobs won't bear patching. They must be done clean or let alone. That's my principle! He's a cock of the game, this, you see," added the captain apologetically; "and you'll not cut his comb without a thick pair of gloves on, I'll warrant him!"

"Permit me to observe, my friend," replied Malletort

coolly, "that this is a mere matter of detail with which I can have no concern. It is not the least in my line, but exclusively in yours. Must I repeat? You name your own price, and work in your own way."

"It cannot be done without cutting his throat," said Bold despondingly, regretting the while, not so much a necessity for bloodshed, as his own sorry chance of carrying out the adventure with a whole skin.

"Of course not," assented the abbé. "Why, he was in the Grey Musketeers of the King!"

"To-night, you say," continued the captain, in the same mournful tone. "I wonder if he rides that bay with the white heels. I've seen him turn the horse on a sixpence, and he's twice as heavy as my mare."

Again Malletort laughed his low mocking laugh.

"Fear not," said he; "there need be no personal collision on foot or on horseback. Sir George travels by the heavy post-coach, like any fat grazier or cattle-dealer, whom you may bid 'Stand and deliver' without a qualm."

"By the coach!" repeated Bold, his face brightening. "That's a different job altogether. That makes the thing much more like business, especially if there's many passengers. You see, they frighten and hamper one another. Why, if there's a stoutish old woman or two anyways near him, it's as likely as not they'll pinion Sir George by both arms, and hold on till we've finished, screaming awful, of course! But you won't make any difference in the price on account of the coach, now, will you? Even chancing the old women, you see, we're very short-handed to do it clean."

"I have said more than once, name your own price," answered the abbé. "I deduct nothing for a friend whom I will myself place by Sir George's side, and who will do the pinioning you speak of more effectually, if with less noise, than a ton of old women. How many hands can you muster?"

"Mounted, of course?" replied the captain. "There's myself, and Blood Humphrey, and Black George. I don't think I can count on any others, but we ought to have one more to do it handsome."

"I will come with you myself," said the abbé. "I have a horse here in the stable, and better arms than any of you."

The captain stared aghast, but so great was the respect with which Malletort inspired his subordinates, that he never dreamed for an instant of dissuading the abbé from an adventure which he might have thought completely out of a

churchman's line. On the contrary, satisfied that whatever the chief of the plot undertook would be well accomplished, he looked admiringly in his principal's face, and observed—

"We'll stop them at the old thorns, half-way up Borrodaile Rise. The coach will back off the road, and likely enough upset in the soft moor. I'll cover Sir George, and pull the moment he's off his seat to get down. The others will rob the passengers, and—and I suppose there is nothing more to arrange?"

The abbé, folding up his papers to leave the room, nodded carelessly and replied—

"We mount in half an hour. Through the heart, I think, Bold. The head is easily missed at a dozen paces from the saddle."

"Through the heart," answered the captain, but Malletort had already quitted the room and closed the door.

"Half an hour," mused Bold, now left to himself in the cold and dimly-lighted apartment. "In half an hour a good deal may be done both in love and war. And Alice promised to be here by now. I thought the gentlemen never *would* go away. What a time they were, to be sure! We make quicker work of it in our trade. How cold it is! I wish I'd a glass of brandy; but I dursn't, no, I dursn't, though I'm all of a shake like. I'll have one 'steadier' just before I get on the mare. If I'm over-primed I shall miss him, and he's not the sort to give a chap a second chance. I wish this job was over. I never half-liked it from the first. Hush! I think that's Alice's cough. Poor little girl! She loves the very boots I wear. I wish she'd come, though. This room is cursed lonesome, and I don't like my own company unless I can have it really to myself. I always fancy there's somebody else I can't see. How my teeth chatter. It's the cold. It *must* be the cold! Well, there's no harm in lighting the fire, at anyrate."

So speaking, or rather muttering, the captain, on whose nerves repeated glasses of brandy at all hours of the day and night had not failed to make an impression, proceeded to collect with trembling hands certain covers of despatches and other coarse scraps of paper left on the floor and table, which litter he placed carefully on the hearth, building the damp sticks over them skilfully enough, and applying his solitary candle to the whole.

His paper flared brightly, but with no other effect than to produce thick, stifling clouds of smoke from the saturated fuel and divers oaths spoken out loud from the disgusted captain.

"May the devil fly away with them!" said he in a towering rage, "to a place where they'll burn fast enough without lighting. And me, too!" he added yet more wrathfully, "for wasting my time like a fool waiting for a jilt who can't even lay a fire properly in an inn chimney!"

The words had scarce left his lips when a discordant roar resounded, as it seemed, from the very wall of the house, and a hideous monster, that he never doubted was the Arch Fiend whom he had invoked, came sprawling on all-fours down the chimney which the smoke had refused to ascend, and made straight for the terrified occupant of the apartment, whose hair stood on end, and whose whole senses were for a moment paralysed with horror and dismay.

In a single glance the captain beheld the black shaggy hide, the wide spreading horns, the cloven hoofs, the long and tufted tail! That glance turned him for one instant to a man of stone. The next, with an irrepressible shout that denoted the very anguish of fear, he sprang through the door, upsetting and extinguishing the candle in his flight, and hurried downstairs, closely, though silently, followed by the monster, who thus escaped from the room before Malletort, alarmed at the disturbance, could re-enter it with a light.

"He's not heart of oak, isn't that chap!" said Slap-Jack, as he turned noiselessly into the stable, where he proceeded to divest himself of the bullock's hide he had worn for his masquerade, and so much of the filth it had left as could be effaced by scraping his garments and washing face and hands with soap and water. But the jest which had been compiled so merrily with his friend and sweetheart seemed to have lost all its mirth in the execution, for the seaman looked exceedingly grave and thoughtful, stealing quietly into the bar in search of his shipmate, with whom he presently disappeared to hold mysterious conference outside the house, secure from all eavesdroppers.

Captain Bold, though for a short space well-nigh frightened out of his wits, was not so inexperienced in the maladies of those who, like himself, applied freely and continuously to the brandy-bottle, to be ignorant that such jovial spirits are peculiarly subject to hallucinations, and often visited by phantoms which only exist in their own diseased imaginations. He had scarcely reached the bar, therefore—a refuge he sought unconsciously and by instinct—ere he recovered himself enough to remember that alcohol was the only specific for the horrors, and he proceeded accordingly to swallow glass after glass till his usual composure of mind should return. He was

nothing loth to use the remedy, yet each succeeding draught, while it strung his nerves, seemed to increase his depression, and for the first time in his life, he felt unable to shake off an uncomfortable conviction, that whether the phantom was really in the chimney or only in his own brain, he had that night received a warning, and was doomed.

There was little leisure, however, either for apprehension or remorse. Malletort, booted and well armed beneath his cassock, was already descending the stairs, and calling for his horse. To judge by his open brow and jaunty manner, his final interview with Florian, whom he had again summoned for a few last words, must have been satisfactory in the extreme. The latter, too, carried his head erect, and there was a proud glance in his eye, as of one who marches to victory.

"You will not fail at the last moment?" said the abbé, pressing St. Croix's hand while they descended the wooden staircase in company, and Florian's reply, "Trust me, I will not fail!" carried conviction even to the cold heart of the astute and suspicious churchman.

So Captain Bold tossed off his last glass of brandy, examined the priming of his pistols, and swung himself into the saddle. His staunch comrades were at his side. The abbé, of whose administrative powers he entertained the highest opinion, was there to superintend the expedition. It was easy, it was safe. Once accomplished, his fortune was made for life. As they emerged upon the snow, just deep enough to afford their horses a sure foothold, the bay mare shook her bit and laid her ears back cheerfully. Even Black George, usually a saturnine personage, acknowledged the bracing influence of the keen night air and the exhilarating prospect of action. He exchanged a professional jest with Blood Humphrey, and slapped his commander encouragingly on the shoulder; but, for all this, a black shadow seemed to hover between Captain Bold and the frosty stars—something seemed to warn him that the hour he had so often jested of was coming on him fast, and that to-night he must look the death he had so lightly laughed at in the face.

CHAPTER LIX

A SUBSTITUTE

WE left Sir George watching in the cold, under a clump of yews, for the chance of seeing his wife's shadow cross one of the lighted windows in the gallery. He remained there far longer than he supposed. So many thoughts were passing through his mind, so many misgivings for the future, so many memories of the past, that he was conscious neither of bodily discomfort nor lapse of time, the chill night-wind nor the waning evening. At length he roused himself from his abstraction with a smile of self-contempt, and, wrapping his cloak around him, would have departed at once, but that his attention was arrested by a muffled figure passing swiftly and stealthily into the garden through the very door he had been watching so long. A thrill of delight shot through him at the possibility of its being Cerise, followed by one of anger and suspicion, as he thought she might, in sheer despair at her lover's absence, be preparing to follow Florian in his flight. But the figure walked straight to his hiding-place, and long before it reached him, even in the doubtful light, he recognised the firm step and graceful bearing of the marquise.

How did she know he was there? How long could she have been watching him? He felt provoked, humiliated; but all such angry feelings dissolved at the sound of her sweet voice, so like her daughter's, while she asked him softly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world that he should be waiting outside within twenty paces of his own house—

"George, what is it? You are disturbed; you are anxious. Can I help you? George, I would do anything in the world for you. Are you not dear to me as my own child—*almost?*"

He tried to laugh it off, but his mirth was forced and hollow.

"I have so many preparations to make. There are so

many trifles to be thought of, even in leaving a place like this, that really, madame, I was only waiting here for a while to remember if I had forgotten anything."

She laid her hand on his arm, as she had laid it long ago at the masked ball, and perhaps the gesture brought back that time to both.

"Even if you can blind Cerise," she said, "you cannot deceive me. And Cerise, poor child, is crying her eyes out by herself; miserable, utterly miserable, as if you had gone away from her for ever. But it is no question now of my daughter; it is a question of yourself, George. *You* are unhappy, I tell you. I saw it as soon as I came here. And I have been watching ever since you left the house, till it should be quite dark, to come and speak to you before you go, and ask for the confidence that Heaven only knows how fully I, of all people, deserve."

There was a world of suppressed feeling in her voice while she spoke the last sentence, but he marked it not. He was thinking of Cerise. "Miserable," said her mother, "utterly miserable, as if he had gone away from her for ever." Then it was for Florian she was grieving, of course. Bah! he had known it all through. Of what use was it thus to add proof to proof—to pile disgrace upon disgrace? It irritated him, and he answered abruptly—

"You must excuse me, madame; this is no time for explanations, even were any necessary, and I have already loitered here too long."

She placed herself directly in his path, standing with her hands clasped, as was her habit when moved by any unusual agitation.

"If you had gone away at once," said she, "I was prepared to follow you. I have watched you from the moment you crossed the threshold. Am I blind? Am I a young inexperienced girl, who has never felt, never suffered, to be imposed on by a haughty bearing and a forced smile? Bah! Do people stand for an hour in the snow reflecting if they have forgotten their luggage? You men think women have no perception, no mind, no heart. You are going, George, and I shall never set eyes on you again—never, never; for I could not bear to see you miserable, and I alone of all the world must not endeavour to console you. Therefore I do not fear to speak frankly now. Listen; something has come between you and Cerise. Do not interrupt me. I know it. I feel it. Do not ask me why. It is not your hand that should add one stripe to my punishment. George, my poor

girl is breaking her heart for your sake; and you, you the man of all others qualified to make a woman happy, and to be happy with her yourself, are destroying your home with your own hands. Look at me, George. I have seen the world, as you know. My lot has been brilliant, fortunate, envied by all; and yet — and yet — I have never had the chance that you so recklessly throw away. No, no; though I may have dreamed of it, I never so deceived myself as to fancy for a moment it was mine! Cerise loves you, George, loves the very ground you walk on, and you are leaving her in anger."

"I wish I could believe it," he muttered, in a hoarse, choking voice; for he was thinking of the pale, dark-eyed priest bending over the rose-trees with his wife.

"Do you think I can be deceived?" broke out the marquise, seizing his hand with both her own, and then flinging it off in a burst of sorrowful reproach. "Wilful! heartless! cruel! Go, then, if go you must, and so farewell for ever. But remember, I warned you. I, who know by bitter experience, the madness, the shame, the agony of an impossible love!"

She turned from him and fled into the house, muttering, as she crossed its threshold, "The poor pelican! how it must hurt when she digs her beak into her bosom, and feeds her young with her own heart's blood!"

Sir George Hamilton stood looking after her for a moment; then he shook his head, drew his cloak tighter round him, and strode resolutely across the park to the Hamilton Arms.

Thus it fell out that when he arrived there, he found the hostelry, lately so full of guests, occupied only by Florian and the two seamen; the first depressed, silent, preoccupied; the others obviously swelling with importance, and bursting to communicate some great intelligence at once.

It was fortunate that the former commander of the *Bashful Maid* retained enough of his old habits to comprehend the tale Slap-Jack had to tell, garnished as it was with professional phrases and queer sea-going metaphors that no landsman could have followed out. From his faithful retainer the baronet learned all the particulars of the Jacobite meeting, and the conspiracy so carefully organised against the throne, discovered by no less futile a contingency than the freak of a barmaid to frighten a highwayman. Sir George believed it his duty now to warn the Government at once. Yet even while reflecting on the importance of his information,

and the noble reward it might obtain, he was pondering how he could escape the delay of an hour in London, and longing for the moment when he should find himself face to face with Florian on the coast of France.

It was characteristic of the man that he gave little thought to the attack meditated upon his own person, simply examining his arms as usual, and desiring Slap-Jack, who had come unprovided, to borrow a brace of pistols wherever he could get them, while he bestowed on Smoke-Jack, who piteously entreated leave to "join the expedition," a careless permission "to take his share in the spree if he liked."

So these four men waited in the warm inn-parlour for the roll of the lumbering coach that was to bear them, as each well knew, into a struggle for life and death. When their vehicle arrived at last, they found themselves its only passengers. The burly coachman descending from his seat to refresh, cursed the cold weather heartily, and in the same breath tendered a gruff salutation to Sir George. The guard, whose face was redder, whose shoulders were broader, and whose voice was huskier even than the coachman's, endorsed his companion's remarks, and followed suit in his greetings to the baronet, observing, at the same time, that he should "take a glass of brandy neat, to drive the cold out of his stomach." This stimulant was accordingly administered by Alice, and paid for by Sir George, who had not lived at Hamilton Hill without learning the etiquette of coach travelling as practised on the North Road. While he placed some silver on the counter, it did not escape him that both functionaries had been drinking freely, possibly to console them for the lack of company, while Slap-Jack, grinning in delight, whispered to his mate—

"If you an' me was to go for to take our spell at the wheel, half-slewed, like them chaps, my eyes, wot a twistin' we should get to-morrow mornin' afore eight bells!"

With so light a freight there was less delay in changing horses than usual. Scarcely a quarter of an hour had elapsed since its arrival ere four moderate-looking animals were harnessed to the coach. The luggage was hoisted on, old Robin rewarded, Mrs. Dodge paid, Alice kissed with much energy by her sweetheart, and Sir George, with Florian, invited to take their places on the front seat behind the driver; then the two seamen clambered up beside the guard, the whip cracked, the hoofs clattered, the whole machine creaked and jingled, while Smoke-Jack, removing the pipe from his mouth with a certain gravity, expressed his devout

hope that "old brandy-face would keep her well up in the wind and steer small!"

It was a cold night, and a cheerless, though light as day, for the moon had risen and the ground was white with snow. Sir George, wrapped in his cloak, with his hand on the butt of a pistol, after some vague remarks about the weather, which Florian appeared not to hear, relapsed into the silence of one who prepares all his energies for an approaching crisis.

The Jesuit seemed unconscious of his companion's existence. Pale as death, even to the lips, his face set, his teeth clenched, his eyes fixed on the horizon before him, as his mental sight projected itself into the unknown future he had this night resolved to penetrate, there pervaded the whole bearing of the man that unearthly air of abstraction peculiar to those who are doomed, whose trial is over, whose sentence is recorded, for whom henceforth there can be neither hope nor fear.

Sir George meditated on a thousand possible contingencies. Already his mind had overleaped the immediate affairs of the night, the coming skirmish, and its possible disaster. These were but every-day matters, familiar to his old habits, and scarce worth thinking of. But there was one scene beyond which his imagination could not be forced; it seemed, as it were, to limit his future in its bounds, and afterwards there would be no aim, no purpose, no relish in life. It represented a spit of sand on the coast of Picardy, and a man with shirt-sleeves rolled up, grasping a bloody rapier in his hand, who was smiling bitterly down on a dead face white and rigid at his feet.

Florian, too, sitting by his side, had his own vision. This, also, was of blood, but blood freely offered in atonement to friendship, and expiation for love.

The night was still, and the moonlight tempered by a misty sky that denoted there would be more snow before morning. The coachman dozed over his wheelers. The guard, overcome with brandy, laid his head on a hamper, and went fast asleep. The two seamen, silently consoling themselves with tobacco, shut an eye apiece, and screwed their faces into the expression of inscrutable sagacity affected by their class when they expect bad weather of any kind. The horses, taking counsel together, as such beasts do, jogged on at the slowest possible pace that could not be stigmatised for a walk, and the heavy machine lumbered wearily up the gradual ascent, which half a mile farther on, where the hill

became steeper and the road worse, was known as Borrodaile Rise.

Now the abbé, in command of his little troop, had intended to conceal them behind a clump of thorns that diversified the plain surface of the moor, almost on the summit of this acclivity, and so pounce out upon his prey at the moment it was most hampered by the difficulties of its path; but, like other good generals, he suffered his plans to be modified by circumstances, and would change them, if advisable, at the very moment of execution.

On the right of the road, if road that could be called, which was but a soft and deeply-rutted track through the heather, stood the four walls of a roofless building, uninhabited within the memory of man, about twenty paces from a deep holding slough, through which the coach must pass; this post, with the concurrence of Bold and his confederates, the abbé seized at once. It offered them some shelter against the storms of sleet that drove at intervals across the moor, while it afforded a covert from which, though mounted, they could reconnoitre unseen, for two miles in every direction, and rush out at a moment's notice on their unsuspecting prey.

So, behind those grey, weather-stained walls, the little party sat their horses, erect and vigilant, reins shortened, firearms primed, swords loosened in the sheath, like a picket of light cavalry when the alarm has sounded, and its outposts have been driven in.

The advancing coach made but little noise as it crept slowly onward through the snow, nevertheless a muttered oath from Blood Humphrey, and the scowl on Black George's brow, announced its arrival ere it came in sight. By the time it could emerge from a certain hollow at fifty yards' distance, and gain the slough, through which it moved heavily and wearily, like a hearse, its huge black mass, brought out against the dead white of the misty, moonlit sky, afforded as fair a target for close shooting as a marksman need desire. Captain Bold had been trembling all over but a few minutes back, now he was firm as a rock, but it cost him a desperate effort thus to man himself, and even while he cocked the pistol in his right hand, gathering his mare at the same time, for a dash to the front, he wished, from the bottom of his heart, he had undertaken any job but this.

"Steady, my friend!" whispered the abbé. "In ten more paces the whole machine must come to a halt. At the instant it stops, cover your man, and level low!"

Then Malletort placed himself behind the others in readiness for any emergency that should arise.

The slough reached nearly to the axles, the wheels scarce moved, the horses laboured—failed—stopped; the coachman, waking with a jerk, swore lustily as he nearly fell from his seat; the guard jumped up and shook himself; Florian's eyes flashed, and a strange, wild smile played over his wan face, while Slap-Jack protested angrily, that "the lubber was aground, d'ye see? and however could he expect the poor thing would answer her helm, when she hadn't got no steerage-way!"

Even while he spoke, a horseman, rising, as it seemed, from the earth, dashed out before the leaders, followed by three more, who, in the hurry and confusion of the moment, looked like a dozen at least.

"Stand and deliver!" exclaimed the foremost, in the customary language of "the road"; but, without waiting to see if this formidable command would be obeyed, he pulled his bay mare together, till she stood motionless like a statue, covered the larger of the two figures behind the coachman, as it rose from its seat, and—fired!

Bold's hand and eye had never served him better than in this, his last crime; but he was anticipated, foiled by a quicker eye, a readier hand than his own. With the very flash of the pistol, even ere the smoke that curled above their heads had melted into air, a heavy body, falling across Sir George's knees, knocked him back into his seat, and Florian, shot through the lungs, lay gasping out his life in jets of blood with every breath he drew.

It was instinct, rather than inhumanity, that caused the old musketeer to take steady aim at the assassin over the very body of his preserver. Ever coolest in extremity of danger, Sir George was, perhaps, surer of his mark here than he would have been shooting for a wager in the galleries of Marly or Versailles. Ere a man could have counted ten, his finger pressed the trigger, and Bold, shot clean through the heart, fell from the saddle in a heap, nor, after one quiver of the muscles, did he ever move again. The bay mare, snorting wildly, would not leave her master, but snuffed wistfully and tenderly round that tumbled wisp of tawdry clothes, from which a crimson stain was soaking slowly into the snow.

Then Sir George turned to Florian, and rested the dying drooping form against his own broad breast. Where was the spit of sand, the lonely duel, now?—the pitiless arm, the bloody rapier, and all the hideous vision of revenge? Gone—vanished—as if it had never been; and, in its stead, a tried, beloved comrade, pale, sinking, prostrate, bleeding helplessly to death.

"Courage, Florian!" whispered Sir George tenderly. "Lean on me while I stanch the blood. You will pull through yet. We will have you back at the Hill in an hour. D——n it, man! Lady Hamilton shall nurse you herself till you get well!"

A gleam came over the dying face, like a ray of sunlight gilding the close of a bleak winter's day.

"I have never been false," he murmured, "never false really in my heart. I swore to save you, George, life for life, and I have kept my oath. I shall not live to see Lady Hamilton again, but—but—you will tell her that it was my body which"—

He turned fainter now, and lay half-propped against the seat he had lately occupied, holding Sir George's hand, and effectually preventing the baronet from taking any further part in the fray.

It is not to be supposed that the two seamen in the back of the coach had been idle witnesses of a tumult which so exactly coincided with their notions of what they termed "a spree." Protected from the fire of the horsemen by a pile of luggage on its roof, or, as Slap-Jack called it, by the deck-cargo, they had made an excellent defence, and better practice than might have been looked for with a brace of borrowed pistols, apt to hang fire and throw high. The guard, too, after a careful and protracted aim, discharged his blunderbuss, with a loud explosion; and the result of their joint efforts was, that the highwaymen, as the last-named functionary believed them, were beaten off. Blood Humphrey's horse was shot through the flank, though the poor brute made shift to carry his rider swiftly away. Black George had his ankle-bone broken, but managed to gallop across the moor after his comrade, writhing in pain, and with his boot full of blood. Bold lay dead on the ground. There was but one of the assailants left—a well-armed man in a cassock, who had kept somewhat in the background; and his horse, too, was badly wounded behind its girths.

Sir George was occupied with Florian, but the others sprang down to take the last of their foes captive; ere they could reach him, however, he had leaped into the bay mare's saddle, and was urging her over the heather at a pace that promised soon to place him in safety, for the bay mare was the fastest galloper in Yorkshire, and her rider knew it was a race for life and death.

"By heavens, it is Malletort!" exclaimed Sir George, looking up from his charge, at sound of the flying hoofs, to

observe something in the fugitive's seat and figure that identified him with the abbé, and gazing after him so intently, that he did not mark the expression of satisfaction on Florian's pain-stricken face when he learned the other had escaped. "I never thought he could ride so well," muttered the baronet, while he watched the good bay mare speeding steadily over the open, and saw the Frenchman put her straight at a high stone-wall, beyond which he knew, by his own experience, there was a considerable drop into a ravine. The mare jumped it like a deer, and after a time rose the opposite slope at a swifter pace than ever. Sir George could only make her out very indistinctly now, yet something in the headlong manner of her career caused him to fancy she was going without a rider.

He had more important matters to occupy him. It had begun to snow heavily, and Florian was growing weaker every minute. With a dying man for their freight; with the absence of other passengers; above all, with the prospect of increased difficulty in progression at every yard they advanced, for the sky had darkened and the flakes fell thicker, guard and driver were easily persuaded to turn their horses' heads, and make the best of their way back to Hamilton Hill. It was but a few miles distant, and Sir George, hoping against hope, tried to persuade himself that if he could only get Florian under his own roof alive, he might be saved.

They were good nurses, that tried campaigner and his two rough, hardy seamen. Tenderly, like women, they stanched the welling life-blood, supported the nerveless, drooping figure, and wiped the froth from the dry, white lips that could no longer speak, but yet made shift to smile. Tenderly, too, they whispered soothing words, in soft, hushed voices, looking blankly in each other's faces for the hope their hearts denied; and thus, slowly, sadly, solemnly, the dark procession laboured back, taking the road they had lately travelled, passed the well-known hostelry, and so wearily climbed the long ascent to the grim, looming towers of Hamilton Hill.

Not a word was spoken. Scarce a sound betrayed their progress. The air was hushed—the flakes fell softly, heavily —the earth lay wrapped in a winding-sheet of snow — and Florian was dead before they reached the house!

CHAPTER LX

SOLACE

BAD news proverbially flies apace, and it is strange how soon the intelligence of any catastrophe pervades an entire household. Though it was towards the small hours of morning that the coach arrived, with its dead freight, at the gates of Hamilton Hill, the whole establishment seemed to arouse itself on the instant, and to become aware, as though by instinct, that something had occurred productive of general confusion and dismay.

Cerise, pale and spiritless, was sitting in her bedchamber, over the embers of a dying fire, thinking wearily of her husband, wondering, with aching heart and eyes full of tears, what could be this shadow that had of late come up between them, and now threatened to darken her whole life. How she wished, yes, she actually wished now, she had never married him. He would have remembered her then as the girl he might have loved. For his own happiness, she protested, she could give him up readily, cheerfully even, to another woman. Then she reviewed all the women of her acquaintance, without, however, being able to fix on one to whom she could make this sacrifice ungrudgingly. She thought, too, how forlorn she would feel deprived of George. And yet, was she not deprived of him already? Could any separation be more complete than theirs? It was torture to reflect that he could not really have loved her, or it would never have come to this. And to leave her thus, without an opportunity for inquiry or explanation. It was careless, unkind, unpardonable. Better to have been sure of his affection, to have known his last thought was for her, and to have seen him brought in dead before her very eyes into the house!

A hurried step was on the stair, a trembling hand flung open the door, and Lady Hamilton's maid rushed into the room, pale, scared, and incoherent, to exclaim—

"Oh! my lady—my lady! Whatever are we to do! The coach has been robbed, and they've brought him back home!

They're carrying him up the front stairs now. Stone dead, my lady! He never spoke, Ralph says, nor moved after the shot. Such a home-coming! such a home-coming! Oh dear! Oh dear!"

Lady Hamilton's jaw dropped, and her whole face stiffened, as if she had been shot herself. Then she wailed out, "He was angry with me when he went away," repeating the same words over and over again, as though attaching no meaning to the sounds, and staggering, with hands extended, like a blind woman, to the staircase, while, numbed and palsied, as it was by the cruel pain, a silent prayer went out from her heart that she might die.

A strong form caught her in its arms, and she looked up in her husband's face, living, unhurt, and kindly; but saddened with a grave and sorrowing expression she had never seen there before.

"Cerise," he whispered, "a great grief has come upon us. There has been a skirmish on the moor, and Florian, poor Florian, has lost his life."

She was sobbing in his embrace, sobbing with an intense and fearful joy.

"Thank God!" she gasped, putting her hair back from her white face, and devouring him with wild, loving eyes. "Darling, they told me it was you—they told me it was you."

Nearer, nearer, he clasped her, and a tear stole down his cheek. It was him, then, all the time she had loved with her whole heart *in spite* of his being her husband. It was for his departure she had been grieving in patient silence; it was his displeasure, and no unhallowed fondness for another, that had lately dimmed the soft blue eyes, and turned the sweet face so pale.

"My love!" he whispered; but, notwithstanding his past suspicions, his injustice, his cruel condemnation, this seemed all the amends he was disposed to make; for he went on to tell her how the coach had been beset, and how he must himself have been killed, but for Florian's self-devotion. Florian, who was now lying dead in the very room that had lately come to be called his own. She wanted no explanation, no apology. She had forgiven him long before he spoke. She had thought him estranged; she had believed him dead; and now he was alive again, and he was her own.

"I care not! I care not!" she exclaimed wildly. "Let them live or die; what is it to me so that you are safe! Shame on me," she added, with more composure, "how selfish I am—

how heartless! Let us go to him, George, and see if nothing can be done."

Nothing could be done, of course. Hand in hand, husband and wife visited the chamber of death, hand in hand they left it, with saddened faces and slow, reverential step. But Sir George never forgot the lesson of that night; never again doubted the woman who had given him her whole heart; nor joined in the sneer of those who protest that purity and self-sacrifice are incompatible with earthly love.

But for the snow, Madame de Montmirail would have left Hamilton Hill next day. It was delightful, no doubt, to witness the perfect understanding, the mutual confidence, that had been re-established between Cerise and her husband; but it was not amusing. "Gratifying, but a little wearisome," said the marquise to herself, while she looked from her window on the smooth undulating expanse of white that forbade the prospect of travelling till there should come a thaw. Never perhaps in her whole life had this lady so much felt the want of excitement, intrigue, business, dissipation, even danger, to take her out of herself, as she expressed it, and preserve the blood from stagnating in her veins. It is only doing her justice also to state that she was somewhat anxious about Malletort. With half a yard of snow on the ground, however, not to mention drifts, it was hopeless to speculate on any subject out of doors till the weather changed.

For Slap-Jack, nevertheless, whose whole life had been passed in conflict with the elements, even a heavy fall of snow seemed but a trifling obstacle, easily to be overcome, and on no account to interfere with so important a ceremony as a seaman's wedding. Assisted by his shipmate, who had consented to officiate as best man on the occasion, he set to work, "with a will," so he expressed it, and cleared away a path four feet broad from the Hill to the Hamilton Arms. Down this path he proceeded in great state to be married, on the very day the thaw set in, attended by Sir George and Lady Hamilton, the marquise, Smoke-Jack, and all the servants of the establishment. Ere the ceremony was accomplished, the wind blew high and the rain fell in torrents, omens to which the old foretop-man paid not the slightest attention, but of which his best man skilfully availed himself to congratulate the bridegroom on his choice.

"It looks dirty to windward," he proclaimed in a confidential whisper, heard by the whole company; "and a chap ain't got overmuch sea-room when he's spliced. But she's

weatherly, mate; that's what *she* is—wholesome and weatherly. I knows the trim on 'em."

At a later period in the afternoon, however, when, I am sorry to say, he had become more than slightly inebriated, Smoke-Jack was heard to express an equally flattering opinion as to the qualities, "wholesome and weatherly," of Mrs. Dodge, not concealing his intention of making a return voyage, "in ballast o' coorse," as he strongly insisted, to these latitudes, when he had delivered a cargo in London. Shrewd observers were of opinion, from these compromising remarks and other trifling incidents of the day, that it was possible the hostess of the Hamilton Arms might be induced to change her name once more, under the irresistible temptation of subjugating so consistent a woman-hater as Smoke-Jack.

But in that century, as in the following, death and marriage trod close on each other's heels. The customers at the Hamilton Arms had not done carousing to the health of bride and bridegroom, the wintry day had not yet closed in with a mild, continuous rain, and Smoke-Jack was in the middle of an interminable forecastle yarn, when a couple of labouring men brought in the body of a darkly-clad foreign gentleman, who had lately been lodging at this roadside hostelry. They had found him half covered by a waning snowwreath just under the wall in the "stell," said these honest dalesmen, below Borrodaile Rise. He must have been dead for days, but there was no difficulty in identifying the abbé, for the frozen element in which he was wrapped had kept off the very taint of death, and preserved him, to use their own language, "in uncommon fettle, to be sure!" Except the marquise, I doubt if anyone regretted him, and yet it seemed a strange and piteous fate for the gifted scholar, the able churchman, the polished courtier, thus to perish by breaking his neck off a Yorkshire mare on a Yorkshire moor.

"Men are so different!" observed Cerise, as she and George discussed the abbé's death, and, indeed, his character, walking together through the park, after the snow was gone, in the soft air of a mild winter's day, nowhere so calm and peaceful as in our English climate.

"And women, too," replied George, looking fondly in the dear face he had loved all his life, and thinking that her like could only be found amongst the angels in heaven.

Cerise shook her head.

"You know nothing about us," said she. "My own, how blind you must have been when you went away and left me nothing of your cruel self but a riding-glove."

He laughed, no doubt well pleased.

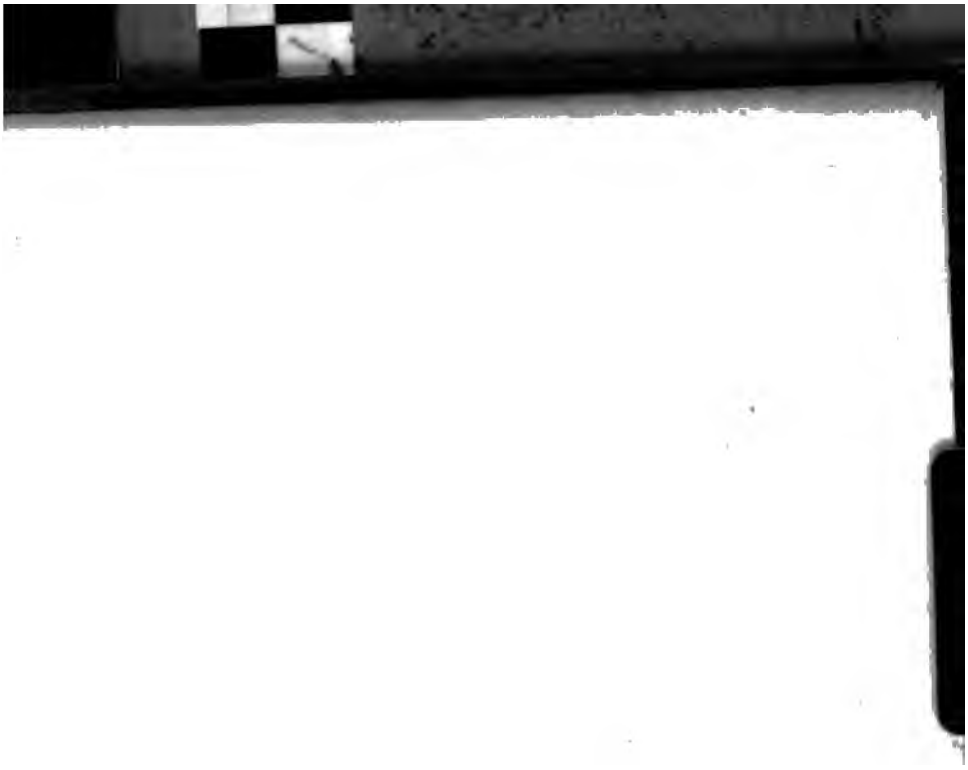
"It was you, then, who had taken it? I looked for it everywhere, and was forced to go away without it."

"You did not look *here*," she answered, and warm from the whitest bosom in the world she drew the missing glove that had lain there ever since the night he left her.

"George," she added, and the love-light in her eyes betrayed her feelings no less than the low, soft accents of her voice, "you know now that I prize your little finger more than all the rest of the world. I never saw another face than yours that I cared twice to look upon, and it is my happiness, my pride, to think that I was never loved by any man on earth but you!"

She raised her head and looked around in triumph while she spoke. Her eye, resting on the church of the distant village, caught a gleam of white from a newly-raised tombstone amongst its graves. An old man wrapping up his tools was in the act of leaving that stone, for he had finished his task. It was but to cut the following inscription:—

FLORIAN DE ST. CROIX.

R. I. P.

THE END